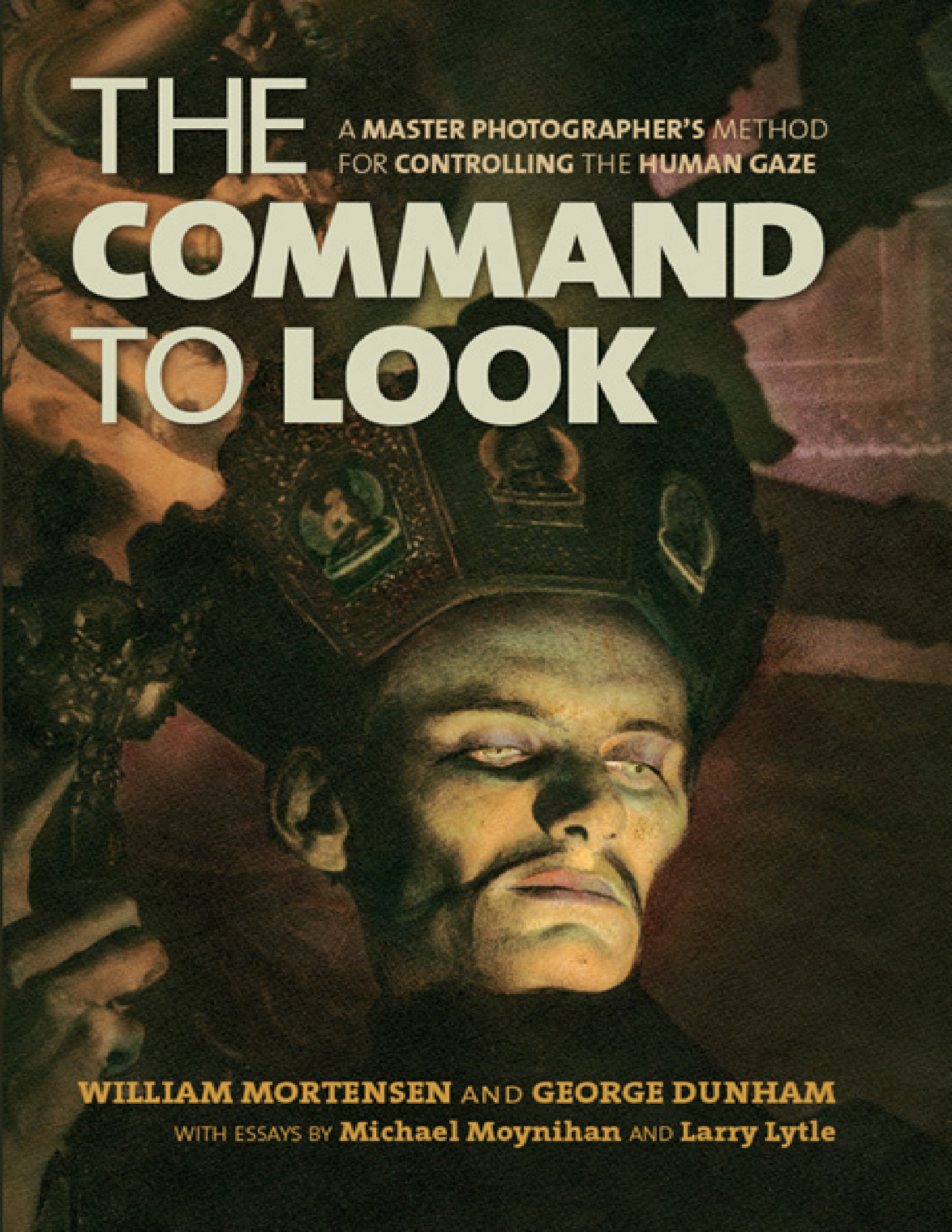

THE COMMAND TO LOOK

A MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER'S METHOD FOR CONTROLLING THE HUMAN GAZE

WILLIAM MORTENSEN AND GEORGE DUNHAM

WITH ESSAYS BY Michael Moynihan AND Larry Lytle

THE COMMAND TO LOOK

A Master Photographer's Method for Controlling the Human Gaze

William Mortensen and George Dunham
Essays by Michael Moynihan and Larry Lytle

Edited by Michael Moynihan

FERAL HOUSE 2014

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THE STORY OF *THE COMMAND TO LOOK*:

WILLIAM MORTENSEN, CREATIVE PICTORIALISM AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONTROL

ALTHOUGH PHOTOGRAPHY POSSESSES a visual language unto itself, printed books that unite photographic images with meaningful text have played an important role in the development of the art form. There are even a few twentieth-century photographers who gained a degree of recognition as literary figures, such as Edward Weston (1886–1958) with his *Day Books* and Ansel Adams (1902–1984) with his technical books on the craft. In explaining their respective approaches and philosophies, they expanded not only our appreciation of the iconic images they created, but also our understanding of the vocabulary and meaning of the photographic medium itself.

At different times in their careers, both men collaborated with female writers who further developed their ideas. Weston's model Charis Wilson (1914–2009) became his muse and later his wife, and wrote the text for his *California and the West*. The photography critic and conservationist Nancy Newhall (1908–1974) collaborated with Adams on *This Is the American Earth*. These two books are rightly considered classics.

William Mortensen (1897–1965) is another photographer whose images and writings about the medium are equally as important as those by the aforementioned figures, although his work was unjustly ignored and overlooked after it fell out of favor in the mid-twentieth century. Like Weston and Adams, Mortensen collaborated on all of his texts with someone whom he felt could better express his techniques and theories. This was George Dunham.[1] That aside, Mortensen's images—and the philosophy behind them—were viewed with scorn by Weston and Adams, the primary artists spearheading the ascendant genre of "straight" or "purist" photography. As the purist ideal came to dominate the field, other approaches like Mortensen's "creative pictorialism" were relegated to obscurity by the art establishment.

In the 1980s the tide began to slowly turn in Mortensen's favor, and since then a growing revival of interest in his work has been underway. He has been included in recent histories of photography and museum exhibitions, and information about him and his images increasingly appears on the Web. Some of this newfound appeal is a result of Mortensen's distinctive methods for making his pictures. To the untutored eye, many of these images could be mistaken for digital manipulations, even though they were created well before the invention of the home computer. Now that the advocates of straight photography have lost their control over the history of the medium itself, enthusiasts are rediscovering Mortensen as an unsung innovator from photography's past.

Even though Mortensen's images have begun to make a comeback, his attendant writings have not yet been fully recognized for their many insights. This is partly due to the scarcity and fragility of the old magazines that carried his articles, and the same is true of his books, which often fetch high prices from rare book dealers and auction sites.

To read Mortensen is to understand his visual work. He openly courted controversy with his devilish ideas, and he used books and articles as a platform to disseminate the "Mortensen Methods." He accomplished this through his fine descriptive abilities and the witty rhetorical style of his coauthor George Dunham. Mortensen drew from areas that ranged widely —encompassing literature, art history and psychology—and as a result his explanations are far more fascinating than is the case with other

photographers whose writings simply serve to document their own particular technique.

To appreciate Mortensen's proper place in the history of photography, it is necessary to explore the underlying ideas that inspired his preternatural imagery. Mortensen laid out the basics of his technical and philosophical approach to "picture-making" in a seminal 1934 essay[2] and in his first four books on methods—*Projection Control* (1934), *Pictorial Lighting* (1935), *Monsters & Madonnas* (1936) and *The Model* (1937). But it is his fifth and most compact book, *The Command to Look* (1937), with its innovative application of psychology to photography, that serves as the real master key for unlocking the secrets of William Mortensen's singular vision.

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BEFORE WE CONSIDER the theories that William Mortensen advanced in *The Command to Look*, it is important to look at the development of the book itself, and why Mortensen felt compelled to write it. Clues to this genesis can be found embedded in a series of letters that Mortensen exchanged with Richard Simon of the New York publishing house Simon & Schuster.

In January of 1936, Richard Simon contacted Mortensen about writing a comprehensive technical photography manual, fully illustrated, and between three hundred and seven hundred pages in length.[3] His idea was for Mortensen to take a newly minted snapshooter through all the steps necessary to become a respectable amateur photographer. Mortensen wrote back to say he was interested in the project, but had to take care of some existing obligations first. At that time he was finishing up *Monsters & Madonnas* (which would fulfill his book contract with Camera Craft Publishing) and he had commitments for several articles in *Camera Craft* magazine as well. He also told Simon that he would like the proposed manual to include the sort of ideas he had put forth in his "Venus and Vulcan" articles in *American Grotesque*, p. 97.

Over the next several months, the two men exchanged letters in which they discussed the proposed book's contents and hammered out details concerning royalties, delivery date for the manuscript, and so on. Mortensen

began working on the book in the late summer of 1936. By that October, however, he sent Simon a telling letter saying that he'd "been barking up the wrong tree. There is definite need for such a book as I have described—but fear that it will have to be written by someone of different qualifications than myself."

Mortensen felt that the result would be little more than another version of *Wall's Dictionary of Photography*, albeit from his personal perspective. Furthermore, he explained:

> *The truth is I am not constitutionally fitted to write an academically "sound" book. I am radical, personal and prejudiced—and when I see a head I am liable to hit it. I have a system, and am a fanatic advocate of it. Photographers of the older school assure me that my system is fantastic, unscientific and subversive. My unscientific justification is that it works, and that nearly five hundred pupils of mine have found the same. The thing that has distinguished my writings from many much more learned and sound books has been (as I deduce from reviews and fan letters) their personal quality and their irreverent dealing with cherished and hoary bugaboos of the profession. The paradox of the matter is that my heresies seem to be more firmly grounded in artistic tradition than are the cautious conventions of old-line photographers.*
>
> *Therefore, what I should like to do (with your permission) is to wholly revise my approach to the problem. When that is done, I think I can turn out a highly personalized Manual of Photography, full of prejudice and controversy, and altogether a much more interesting and readable book than the sound text-book job I have been trying to do. There is plenty of substantial material on the scientific phases of photography, but there is next to nothing useful on its expressive and creative phases. The growth of photography as a mode of expression has been held back by a great deal of tiresome tosh put on paper by quasi-scientific authorities who were without an appreciation of the tradition and aims of art and who were not even good craftsmen in their own line. Modern Photography is miles away from realizing its potentialities—as any intelligent layman can see from the appalling preponderance of bad standards, bad art,*

bad taste, and bad photography in contemporary salons and annuals. Photography needs a thorough overhauling, a candid appraisal of what is valuable and what is useless in concept, process and equipment, and a drastic elimination of pernicious rubbish.

Please let me know what you think of this change of plan.
Very truly yours,
[William Mortensen]

Simon acknowledged Mortensen's desire to include his philosophy, but told him that he still wanted a manual that "Henry" would buy (Henry being any beginning photographer). He wanted it structured like either of Mortensen's first two books, *Projection Control* or *Pictorial Lighting*, which were revered by Simon. Mortensen gave in, saying that the first part of the book would provide the reader with "the ideology and justification for the reduction of all elements to a 'minimum essentials' basis." He then told Simon that he would reinstate "Henry," satirically stating: "Possibly the History of Henry might form a better introduction than the one I have outlined."

At the end of 1936 Simon let Mortensen know that he intended to write and publish his own photography manual as well, but that it wouldn't interfere with Mortensen's book.[4] Simon, himself an avid amateur photographer, had been working on a book from a novice photographer's viewpoint; he assumed that Mortensen's book, by contrast, would be written from a professional's perspective. In the same letter Simon asked about Mortensen's use of the word "us" in his last missive, in which Mortensen had sent a skeletonized outline. He hoped that Mortensen was writing the book alone. Here it is evident that Simon had no knowledge of George Dunham's collaborative role in all of Mortensen's previous books and articles.

Mortensen's responses to Simon about the outline of the book reveal a growing frustration over Simon's demands regarding the proposed content. The original deadline of June 1937 came and went, after which Mortensen sent Simon this letter:

Dear Mr. Simon,

I sat me down some months ago to finish off a Manual of Photography for Simon and Schuster. But things panned out entirely differently from what I expected. Somewhere along the line I got diverted from how to hold a camera and the problems of exposure and development—and this is what happened. The thing that happened—the manuscript for a book entitled THE COMMAND TO LOOK and the illustrations for it—I am mailing you today.

Your publications are really to blame for what happened, for since I last corresponded with you I have read [Dorothea Brande's] Wake Up and Live! *and also Dale Carnegie's book [*How to Win Friends and Influence People*]. It seems that this "Formula for Success" formula was a sound and surefire way of putting over what you have to say. Hence—THE COMMAND TO LOOK. As to the theme: It deals with certain absolutely indispensible principles that seem to have been ignored by all the books on pictorial composition. The writers provide you plentifully with "rules of composition," and overlook the fact that all the rules in the world won't do you any good if you don't have a* picture. *This book endeavors to get back to the beginning and to deal with the problem*: What makes a picture?

Knowledge of this sort is a prime need of photographers of today, whether they realize it or not. I notice this need in the work of all students that come to me. It appears in the published pictures in photo magazines. It is evident even in the salons. Fine competent photographs, most of them; but not one in a hundred is a picture.

And picture-making's something that can be taught. The elements of a good picture are almost as tangible and constant as the ingredients of a good apple pie. Of course, skill in compounding and a touch of genius, culinary or pictorial, is required to bring this thing to a completely successful culmination. But you have done much to help the floundering student if you start him off with a good recipe.

The book, as you will see when you receive the manuscript, is in two parts: first, text with illustrations; second, pictures with comments. Please don't judge the quality of the picture by the small attached prints: these are just copies for convenience in reference. I am sending along (by express) five originals which will serve to give

you a general idea of the lot. If the book interests you I will send on the rest immediately.

Some of these pictures, as you will recognize, have previously appeared in the books for Camera Craft. I have Camera Craft's permission to use these in other publications.

If you like the book, I will have a few suggestions to make concerning format and layout. Meanwhile, I will content myself with saying that I had something in mind that would cost not in excess of $2.00 or $2.50—something small and companionable rather than gaudy and inconvenient.

In case you don't feel this book is down your alley please let me know with all convenient haste so that I may place it elsewhere.

Just a word of reassurance. This is not intended as a substitute for the MANUAL. I will continue work on that formidable tome. Meanwhile I hope that THE COMMAND TO LOOK will interest you.

Very truly yours,
[William Mortensen]

Although there is no record of Simon's response to Mortensen's proposal, it is obvious that he rejected the book. Mortensen then offered *The Command to Look* to Camera Craft, who agreed to publish it. Mortensen must have in fact renewed his contract with Camera Craft sometime in 1936, as he was working on another practical manual, *The Model*, during this same period. Both books were published by the company in 1937, with *The Command to Look* appearing in the "small and companionable" form that Mortensen had intended.

The remainder of the existing correspondence between Simon and Mortensen reveals an escalating exasperation from both sides. Mortensen continued to work on the manual for Simon, sending him twenty-four pages of the manuscript. Simon expressed various reservations, fearing that the reader might not get Mortensen's irony in the section where he listed camera equipment. (Mortensen was opposed to extraneous "gadgets," preferring that his students use a simple camera and lens.) Simon also felt the text was too technical, but paradoxically was unhappy because Mortensen had skipped over any discussion of optics and sensitometry.

Mortensen fired back that he had no use for those two topics, saying that he was just a "picture-maker," and once he found something that worked, he used it—whatever it was. He said the book would be no manual in the conventional sense, but more useful than "a dozen manuals" and "as crabbed, cantankerous and personal as I can make it." Rebelliously, he refused to send along any more chapters until it was completed because he didn't want any influences that would drag him down. The book would be finished, "for better or worse by the end of summer." In a parting note he told Simon that he'd reduce the amount of irony in the book or at least warn the reader.

Even though their letters remained cordial, the frustration of working with Simon was apparent, and this situation had surely been compounded by Mortensen's disappointment at Simon's lack of support for *The Command to Look*, a book that he felt offered much more than another hackneyed technical manual. The correspondence between them ends in late 1937, but it would take three more summers before Mortensen and Simon managed to wring out the balky technical treatise that became *Mortensen on the Negative*. Judging from the extant letters and the amount of time that passed, it was clearly a difficult book for Mortensen to write, and one that demanded many concessions on his part. He even included the dreaded section on optics and sensitometry.

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WILLIAM MORTENSEN'S OVERRIDING PRINCIPLE in making photographs was the application of artistic control to every aspect of their production. All of his books and articles leading up to *The Command to Look* reflect that mission, and by the mid-1930s his writings and photographs had brought him an immense amount of notoriety and popularity. Each of his earlier books had already been reprinted at least once, if not twice. The *Camera Craft* issues containing his articles sold out on a regular basis. The time therefore seemed ripe for him to bring out a completely theoretical book that conveyed his ideology in distilled form.

When it appeared in 1937, *The Command to Look* seemed timely in other ways as well. Only a year before, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which had inspired much of Mortensen's

rhetoric in *Command*, had become a runaway bestseller. For a public that was struggling to cope with the Great Depression, treatises of this sort offered straightforward formulas and promised readers a modicum of control over their lives.[5] Mortensen's book applied the "formula for success" to an entirely new area: the creative art manual. And whereas his earlier books on methods emphasized technical "control" being exercised by the photographer, *The Command to Look* took this to the next level by outlining a means to exert perceptual control *on the viewer*. Here was a codified strategy for photographic amateurs to finally get their photographs accepted into camera club salons.

The reception of the book was not what Mortensen had hoped for, however. Each of his previous books had received rave reviews, but this one was met with misunderstanding at best. *The British Photographic Journal* for example had praise for *The Model*, but expressed serious reservations about *The Command to Look*: "one gets the impression that Mr. Mortensen has consciously adopted a certain formula for his pictures and is proceeding to exploit it, and a good many of his remarks savour of a behaviourist text-book of psychology."[6]

The original editions of *The Command to Look* suffered from a number of other issues. The book was small (about 4½" by 6") and cheaply produced. It was spiral-bound with a plastic-comb or metal-ring binding, and the book tended to fall apart after moderate use. The impact of the images was greatly diminished due to their size, which was too small to convey many subtleties. (Mortensen typically printed his salon prints at the standard size of 11" x 14", so shrinking the pictures to 3½" x 5" or smaller for this book did them no favors.) In some print runs the reproductions were murky, making them even less impressive.

Despite its physical shortcomings and poor critical reception, *The Command to Look* still managed to go through six printings between its first appearance in 1937 and its final printing in 1948. The sixth printing finally ran out in 1956, at which point the book was officially declared to be out-of-print.

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WILLIAM MORTENSEN HAD MADE his first real foray onto ideological ground in 1934 with a popular five-part series of articles in *Camera Craft* entitled "Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism." Here Mortensen was able to shape and promulgate his theory of Creative Pictorialism while bludgeoning his purist opponents, categorizing them as a "reformist movement" and condemning their work as "hard and brittle." As he further put it:

> The Realists have laid great emphasis on the purity of their art —"pure photography," unpolluted by any of the methods, mannerisms, or qualities of the graphic arts of painting, drawing, etching, etc. "Purity" is conceived to consist in limiting photographic expression to the mechanically objective representation that is inherent in the uncontrolled camera, and in limiting processes to the simplest and most primitive type. Thus the photo-chemical process, seizing its tail in its mouth, finds its realization in itself.[7]

By firing the first volley in the purist vs. pictorialist debate, Mortensen was thereby able to define the purists' approach to photography, forcing them to defend their photographic procedures and philosophy. It is always difficult to refute a negative, and "Venus and Vulcan" served as an astute piece of classic political rhetoric—define your opponent before he or she defines you.

By framing the attack as he did, Mortensen in turn posed a very important question for his readers: Why would you join a group whose main purpose is to limit what you can do or use in the creation of your photographic ideas? And the answer presented in this article was simple: *if you follow me, you won't have to.*

Mortensen's assault on Purism also gave him the opportunity to introduce a connection between psychology and making art: "Psychological truth, not scientific accuracy, is the species of veracity, with which art is concerned—conformity not to fact, but to the mind's way of apprehending fact."[8] This began the discussion that Mortensen carried on in *Monsters & Madonnas* and finished in *The Command to Look*: a viewer's perceptions of

the world *can* be manipulated through the deliberate use of psychological principles.

In practice, Mortensen's Creative Pictorialism was realized through a multi-stage process and the combination of manifold methods.[9] First, the photographer/artist must come up with an idea for a "picture"; he or she would then take care in posing the model and in photographing the subject by using various lighting controls; and only at that stage could the negative become a "picture" through the many further methods of control over development and printing, and the use of manipulation and modification. All of these procedures were elaborated upon at length in his books and articles, but what ultimately brought the aspiring acolyte to the "Method" were Mortensen's images themselves.[10]

With its beautiful photogravure reproductions, *Monsters & Madonnas* was the most important of Mortensen's books for visually "selling" the amateur a sense of what could be achieved by the use of his methods. The book also acted as a poor man's Mortensen photo collection, as it was designed to allow for the removal of the photogravures while retaining the information still bound between the covers. Each image is accompanied by Mortensen's extended commentary explaining the genesis and raison d'être for the picture.

The first part of the book contains a philosophical discussion about how an infatuation with the "machine" (which Mortensen terms the "Monster") can overwhelm the artist's ability to engage with his or her innate creativity (the "Madonna"). Mortensen's contention is that the camera—with all its intrinsic technical demands, coupled with the newcomer's penchant to buy any gadget that will aid in the making of the perfect photograph—actually has a tendency to interfere with the creative process. A photographic artist must therefore give himself or herself over to creativity, as opposed to fretting about the next new piece of equipment that will enhance the picture-taking experience.

The second part of the book exhibits the fruits of Mortensen's creative approach and demonstrates his masterful control over compositional space and subject matter. The images are divided into three categories, "Characters," "Nudes" and "Grotesques," with commentaries on these larger topics as well as on each of the specific images. As the title implies,

the “Characters” section contains no straight portraits. Instead they illustrate universal, symbolic and emotional states of mind and intriguing historical personages. The “Nudes” represent what was, and still is, a pervasive photographic genre. Mortensen’s perspective on this delicate subject incorporates both a history of the nude and a running commentary on the prudery of Western Civilization toward the unclothed—mainly female—body. Although he occasionally discusses the process he used to create a particular photograph, for the most part his text is a defense of the nude portrait *per se.*

The final section, “Grotesques,” represents an area of singular importance for Mortensen. He was drawn to the subjects of fear and death, and had strong opinions on the various expressions of the grotesque. Reading his commentary on the history of such themes in the visual arts provides a glimpse into his subconscious. For Mortensen this was a fertile realm that motivated him to create countless images of witches, demons, and mythological subjects.

In *Monsters & Madonnas*, Mortensen wanted to steer clear of talking about any explicit technical information, such as developers, f-stops, printing papers and so on, and instead concentrate on the *thought process that lay behind the making of each image*. The technical data for each photograph appears in a small, perfunctory table on the facing page. This information was probably included as a result of editorial pressure from the publisher. Mortensen reveals his own feelings on the matter in a concluding caveat, where he states:

> Many amateurs who should be reading these words are now engaged in scanning the data lists with an eager and lustful eye. ‘Here,’ they are saying, ‘is How It Was Done.’ Could I reach them, I would answer something like this: No, Kiddies; this is not how it was done. The data are but the bone and gristle from which all good sustaining juices have been boiled away. The data lists are true in all details, but (for the person who wants to make pictures) they are the least valuable information that the book contains.[11]

Mortensen’s implication here—that the idea for the picture, the substance of the picture, and the emotional content of the picture are all that

matters—is a bit disingenuous, of course. The "idea" is only one part of a much larger equation. In order to create the sorts of pictures that he advocates in his books, one must have a superior mastery of all aspects of photography, along with a thorough understanding of his very complex methods.

With its focus mainly on aesthetic content and creativity, however, *Monsters & Madonnas* paved the way for Mortensen's least technical and most idea-driven book: *The Command to Look.*

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THE COMMAND TO LOOK imparts no technical information whatsoever. It is best seen as a treatise on the use of psychology and visual perception to construct a picture. Early in the book, Mortensen instructs the reader that "any picture that 'goes places' does so by following a definite psychological formula."[12] The "formula for picture success" which he then explicates is actually a primer on how to use the brain's hardwired receptors to manipulate or control the viewer's interest in and reaction to a photograph.

Although he never specifically states which branch (or branches) of psychology provided the basis for his claims, Mortensen seems to have been influenced by Carl Jung's theories concerning the collective unconscious and archetypes. Mortensen conceives this in a broader category, identifying it with an inborn and subliminal response to fear stimuli in all humans: *"We give our attention first to those sense impressions that represent things that we once, far back in racial history, feared."*[13]

From an evolutionary perspective, Mortensen's premise regarding fearful impressions makes a good deal of sense: natural selection would favor those with the capability to subconsciously recognize a predator and successfully escape any concomitant threat. Mortensen and Dunham may have been extrapolating Darwinian ideas into his formula, but in doing so they hit upon ideas that have since gained scientific validity. I discussed this section of *The Command to Look* with a neuroscientist, Dr. Holly Carlisle, who informed me that current work being done in the field of Visual

Attention Theory gives credence to Mortensen's postulation. Dr. Carlisle encapsulates some of the most recent and pertinent hypotheses as follows:

> Because we are constantly inundated with far more visual information than we can efficiently process, our brains have evolved "attentional" mechanisms to filter out unimportant stimuli. Modern theories of visual processing posit that both voluntary and involuntary modes of attention exist.[14] Among the visual stimuli that elicit involuntary attention, those that represent a threat (such as predatory/dangerous animals or angry faces) are especially effective at capturing attention.[15] It is hypothesized that a strong evolutionary advantage was conferred to organisms that could rapidly recognize and respond to threats within an environment with many competing stimuli. In accord with Mortensen's treatise on composition, many studies support the notion that representations of threat can be reduced to simple geometric forms. For example, geometric abstractions that contain sharp angles are less preferred than those that contain curved forms. On a neurological level, V-shaped figures with a downward-facing vertex (meant to be abstractions of angry features of faces) more strongly activate the fear-processing region of the brain, called the amygdala, than V-shaped figures with an upward-facing vertex.[16]

For Mortensen, these geometric forms contribute subconsciously to the "Impact" (or "Pictorial Imperative") of the picture. The Impact causes a subliminal reaction, or "double take," that commands the viewer to take notice and look at the picture. One can create Impact through the use of four visual patterns, which an astute photographer will deliberately integrate into an image: the diagonal, the S-curve, triangles and obstacles. Each pattern addresses a different fear response. The diagonal represents swiftness, as from the motion of a predator; the S-curve represents a furtive or slithering motion, such as from a snake; triangles represent sharpness; and the obstacle creates a dominant mass that blocks our way, impedes our progress or hides an enemy. All of these shapes trigger a subconscious fear response

that touches our primal core, forcing us to look at the image—and, hopefully, to subjectively engage with it.

Once the initial subliminal shock subsides, Mortensen cautions that a second element of psychological control must then come into play. This he calls the "Subjective Interest." The patterns that formed the initial attention-getting moment must now resolve into subject matter that appeals to the viewer's basic human emotions. Subjective Interest was a theory that Mortensen drew from his time studying Cecil B. DeMille's approach to cinema. He then streamlined and adapted the theory for use in still photography. It posits that there are three primary categories of emotionally affective power: Sex, Sentiment and Wonder. Sex and Sentiment are fairly self-explanatory categories, reflecting what we would expect to experience when looking at a nude (Sex) or a photograph of a couple in love (Sentiment). Wonder is a bit more ambiguous and allows for several interpretive possibilities. Wonder can mean an exploitation of religious themes (as DeMille used it), but to Mortensen's mind it was most powerful when it drew upon the imagery of the grotesque, the occult, fear, or even death. It was the theme that he employed the most and understood the best.

When utilizing these three Subjective Interest themes, Mortensen insists that any reference to a "dateline" be eradicated. He feels that for a photograph to be universal, to live beyond its time, it should not allow the viewer to place it in a specific time period. With the acceptance of photojournalism in the collected and exhibited realm of art photography, Mortensen's injunction against including a dateline has become a moot point.[17]

The third and final element of Mortensen's formula dealt with an aspect of control that all art seeks to accomplish through various tricks of representation and composition. Mortensen called it "You and The Picture." The concept is to guide the now-engrossed viewer through the picture's space by way of textures, lines and visual hindrances. This is important, as it allows the viewer to participate in the photograph by directing his or her gaze to and through areas of tactile pleasure. Mortensen also uses this portion of the book to once again attack purist photographers, criticizing their representation of texture by pointing out that "The Purist's picture fails to give so true an impression of *the real tactile quality of the texture* as the

less literal version that limits full detail to a few climactic 'tarrying points.' The complete detail in *all* parts of the Purist's version prevents the eye from moving and arriving at an appreciation of the texture in its tactile qualities."[18]

As with *Monsters & Madonnas*, Mortensen divides *The Command to Look* into two main sections: the first presents his ideas and the second provides a gallery of photographic examples. The gallery contains fifty-five images with facing-page commentaries that explain how the photograph demonstrates the concepts of Impact, Subjective Interest, and the visual tricks referred to in "You and The Picture."

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THE COMMAND TO LOOK is an important and unique volume in the annals of photography. To my knowledge, nothing like it had ever been tried in a mass-market photography book. There had been many photo books written with commentary, of course, but the essays or stories were meant as a narrative to the pictures. Other books, like those of Henry Peach Robinson and Peter Henry Emerson, expressed their authors' positions about photography as an art form. What set *The Command to Look* apart was Mortensen's use of psychology to support his theories of control. The book functioned less as an explanation and more as a revelation.

The Command to Look is a revelation because at the time it was written most artists—with the surrealists being the notable exception—would not have thought to integrate any psychological precepts into their work. In this respect, it appears that Mortensen harbored some surrealist tendencies.[19] This is not so much in a formal sense, as laid out by André Breton, but is rather akin to the nightmarish constructs of film directors like Tod Browning or James Whale. Some of Mortensen's images have the dreamlike qualities of Jean Cocteau's film *La Belle et la Bête* or the frightening hallucinations in Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. These impulses are evident in Mortensen's description of the Wonder theme:

> It is ingenious and childlike in the form of fairy tales. It takes a humorous turn in grotesque art. It may turn morbid in an interest in

the mal-forms of life: the perennial interest in sideshow attractions such as the fat lady and the man who writes with his toes.[20]

The surrealists also put great stock in the role chance plays in creating art. Although Mortensen advocated strict control over every aspect of the photographic process, he was notably receptive to chance at the beginning stage of the initial photo shoot. In *Monsters & Madonnas* he tells the reader to be open to the "happy accident": the chance movement that occurs in the model's pose, or the image that mysteriously happens to rise above the rest as one looks over a proof sheet of pictures.

Mortensen's theories in *The Command to Look* also foreshadow certain aspects of postmodern philosophy. His ideas about how one connects to images through emotion, and how Impact can be used to create a climactic point in the composition, parallel those of philosopher Roland Barthes. In his book *Camera Lucida*, Barthes cryptically discusses his encounters with photographs that contained what he calls the *stadium* (emotional connection, an ability to speak to the viewer) and the *punctum* (some detectable or indescribable point that catches the viewer's attention).[21] For Barthes, the interaction between the "spectator" (viewer) and the photograph takes on a primary importance, as it does with Mortensen.

Last but not least, Mortensen's theories in *The Command to Look* foreshadow the use of subliminal techniques in film and advertising that gained precedence in the latter half of the twentieth century. He thought of his system of Impact and Subjective Interest as a way to manipulate and entice the viewer into a consumptive relationship with his photographs: "In speculations about art there has been too much said about rules of composition and the motives and emotions of the artist. What counts finally is the reaction of the ultimate consumer—of the guy that looks at the picture."[22] Mortensen is using the word "consumer" here less to mean the purchaser of an object or service, but rather a person who acquires knowledge. Nevertheless, the allusion to a consumer—someone drawn by advertising into some form of consumption—was, I think, purposeful.

One could go on, but the above remarks suffice to show the ongoing relevance of *The Command to Look* and William Mortensen's distillation of the "pictorial imperative." The ideas laid out in this "small and

companionable" book were well ahead of their time. In no way do they limit themselves to the photographic medium, for the essential principles can be applied effectively to any of the visual arts, and probably far beyond. Thus, more than seventy-five years after its initial and uncertain publication, *The Command to Look* remains a premonition of wonders yet to come.

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1 For more about their collaboration see my essay "The Life of William Mortensen" in *American Grotesque: The Life and Art of William Mortensen*, ed. Larry Lytle and Michael Moynihan (Feral House, 2014).

2 This essay, "Venus and Vulcan," is reprinted in *American Grotesque.*

3 All of the letters that I refer to, paraphrase, or quote from in this introduction are from the correspondence between Mortensen/Dunham and Richard Simon that took place between 4 January 1936 and 8 September 1937. They are at the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson in the William Mortensen Archive and the George Dunham/William Mortensen Collection. My thanks to the archive and to Leslie Squyres, Director of the Volkerding Center for Research & Academic Programs, for giving me permission to reprint material from these letters. With the exception of occasional minor typographical corrections, the letters are reproduced here verbatim.

4 This manual is Richard L. Simon, *Miniature Photography from One Amateur to Another* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1937).

5 See Gary Greenberg, "The Almighty Dollar: America's Self-help Gospel," *Harper's*, February 2014, 90–97.

6 Review by "P. C. S." in *The British Journal of Photography*, vol. 85 (Feb. 1938), 108.

7 "Venus and Vulcan, pt. 4: Fallacies of 'Pure Photography,'" in *American Grotesque*, 124.

8 "Venus and Vulcan, pt. 4," *127.*

9 See my essays on "The Life of William Mortensen" and "A Glossary of Mortensen's Methods" in *American Grotesque.*

10 See "A Mortensen Gallery of Grotesques" in *American Grotesque.*

11 "A Note on the Notes," *Monsters & Madonnas* (San Francisco: Camera Craft, 1936), unpaginated.

12 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 31.

13 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 46.

14 See Marvin M. Chun and Jeremy M. Wolfe, "Visual Attention," in *Blackwell Handbook of Sensation & Perception*, ed. E. Bruce Goldstein (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 272–310.

15 Aprajita Mohanty and Tamara J. Sussman, "Top-down modulation of attention by emotion," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013), article 102.

16 Christine Larson, et al., "Recognizing Threat: A Simple Geometric Shape Activates Neural Circuitry for Threat Detection," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 21:8 (August 2009), 1523–35.

17 In many cases he ignored this principle himself, for example when he costumed his models to look like historical or particularly as Renaissance figures, thus placing them in a definite time period.
18 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 69.
19 Deborah Irmas makes a case for Mortensen as a surrealist in her essay about him for the catalog *Pacific Dreams: Currents of Surrealism and Fantasy in California Art, 1934–1957*, ed. Susan Ehrlich (Los Angeles: Armand Hammer Museum of Art, 1995), 150–53.
20 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 57.
21 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).
22 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 43.

THE COMMAND TO LOOK

A FORMULA FOR PICTURE SUCCESS

WILLIAM MORTENSEN
AND GEORGE DUNHAM

TO MY SISTER, ELLEN,
IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

FOREWORD

Twelve years ago, although technically competent, I tried in vain to obtain notice for my pictures, to get them into salons or into print.

Then I found out that any picture that "goes places" does so by following a definite psychological formula.

This little book relates the discovery of this formula, analyzes it in detail, and shows its concrete application in a series of prints that have won the approbation of publishers and salons. The book has nothing to do with technical problems, but is solely concerned with the making of effective pictures.

As I have found by experiments with my students, the formula is one of wide applicability. Anyone of fair technical competence should be able, by making use of this formula, to bring about substantial improvement in the effectiveness of his pictures.

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1.
PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Did you ever think that you saw the possibilities of a fine picture in a bit of landscape or a street scene that happened to catch your eye? Did the accidental pose of a child ever strike you as having pictorial potentialities?

Did you ever eagerly point a camera in the direction of these interesting objects and take some pictures? Were you dissatisfied with the results? Did you ever wonder what was the vital element that you had missed? Did you ever consider why the thing that so stirred your imagination became crass and stupid when converted into a photograph?

Did you ever select some bit of your work that your friends had admired and send it along, with a little prayer and return postage, to the annual show of the Middletown Camera Club or to the Pittsburg Salon? Did you ever, after due time, receive it back with thanks and firm rejection?

Did you ever look through annuals, photographic magazines and salon catalogues and wonder to yourself, “What have these fellows got that I haven’t got?”

Did you ever feel that you would gladly give ten years off your life if you could just see one of your pictures on the walls of the Pittsburg Salon or reproduced in *Life* or some photographic annual?

All of these things *I* have done. Twenty years ago I was possibly the worst photographer on the North American continent. Some of my candid critics have implied that I still hold that distinction; but it is a fact that my pictures, for better or for worse, are more widely seen and exhibited than those of my critics.

Fifteen years ago I had acquired an adequate command of the technical details of photography. But my pictures got nowhere.

Then I discovered—But I am infringing on the material for the next chapter.

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2.
PERSONAL HISTORY
ORIGIN OF THE FORMULA

Late in the year 1918, Company D of the 13th Regiment of the U.S. Army gratefully severed its connection with Private Mortensen, W.

I was mustered out at Camp Merritt, New Jersey. Presently I crossed the river to Manhattan and enrolled in the classes of the Art Students League. Here I took the usual art courses under such men as George Bellows, Robert Henri and George Bridgman. After two years of this, I was commended for my industry but declared to have "no talent for drawing."

Undeterred by this verdict, I obtained financial backing and took passage for Greece, to make etchings of the monuments of ancient Attica. I took with me a heavy burden of copper plates and a great deal of youthful enthusiasm. My financial arrangements had, unfortunately, neglected to provide me with the means of eating; so, instead of drawing the Propylea by moonlight, I shortly found myself engaged in painting poster designs for a popular brand of cognac. The prevalent theme of these posters consisted of a series of Balkan ballerinas poised seductively tip-toe on the corks of bottles. Before long the demand for these was exhausted, and I returned to New York on money loaned to me by the American Consul. One of the last things I remember seeing in Greece was a fat Greek sailor looking with evident approbation at one of my cognac cuties displayed on the walls of a honky-tonk in Piraeus.

Back in America, an artist and man of the world, I "accepted a position" (as the saying goes) teaching art in the Eastside High School of my hometown, Salt Lake City. Here I busied myself bringing the message of the Old Masters to sixty seductive young Mormons. During this time, becoming increasingly conscious of my limitations as a draughtsman, I began experiments with photography. My camera at the time was a 5x7

view. My first models were girls from my classes, who posed for me after school hours—to the great distress of the janitor. On Saturdays I packed my camera, my model, and a yard of crepe de chine into the sidecar of my motorcycle and sought *al fresco* settings in the adjoining countryside. I regret to report that the Dean of Women followed us on one such occasion. At the end of the year it was mutually agreed between the Board of Education and myself that it would be best for all concerned that I submit my resignation.

From out of the West had come rumors of big doings in Hollywood. So I packed my motorcycle sidecar with my camera, with hundreds of costume plates, and with a large collection of masks I had been making. I also hopefully included my yard of crepe de chine—just in case. With these—and forty dollars—I headed West.

Hollywood was at that time passing through its most super-colossal phase. It had outgrown the fumbling and awkwardness of its first days, and had not yet run into the doldrums of the early talkie period. It was beginning to be conscious of its power. It was huge and vulgarly magnificent, grandiose and spectacularly colorful. Size was its god and DeMille its prophet. This was the time of the exploitation of the "cutie." Certainly never before in history had so many and such varied examples of feminine pulchritude been gathered together in a single place.

Into this seething Babylon, masquerading as a suburb of Los Angeles, I plunged with my view camera, my forty dollars, and my yard of crepe de chine.

How I survived those first months remains at this date something of a mystery to me. Presently I found myself working for Ferdinand Pinney Earle, designing sets and costumes for his spectacular production of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. This picture made much use of trick camera work—of which I took due note. I owe a great deal to the influence of this man, with his combined gifts of showmanship and outlandish imagination.

Through the influence of Theodore Kosloff of the Russian Ballet I got a job with Cecil B. DeMille and became a neophyte fairly near the throne in this Hollywood hierarchy. During the following six years I was employed on nearly every DeMille production, designing sets and costumes and making hundreds of masks.

Meanwhile, I carried on my photographic experiments and after a while set up shop as a portrait photographer on Hollywood Boulevard. During this time I had models aplenty (from the dancing classes of Theodore Kosloff, Marion Morgan and Ruth St. Denis), took thousands of nudes. Of these thousands, a mere half-dozen survive. In a self-critical frenzy some time later I destroyed the lot.

I also developed a strange facility for attracting and gathering about me all sorts of odd characters and freaks. My studio swarmed with midgets, acromegalic giants, fat ladies, pinheads, dog-faced boys, bearded women, and all the weird residue of defunct circuses. These strange folk fascinated me with their pictorial possibilities.

In 1924 the entire eleventh floor of the Western Costume Company was turned over to me as a studio and workshop. This concern was at that time virtually the storehouse and treasure chest of the entire picture industry. Here I had access to at least ten thousand costumes and an infinite store of properties in the way of jewelry, armor, swords, and similar expensive and rare items of decoration. As models, I had available almost any of the screen personages who happened to drop in for a costume fitting—which included a large proportion of the "big names" of that day. Here are just a few of those who sat for me during this period: Rudolph Valentino, Alla Nazimova, Norma Shearer, Ramon Novarro, Betty Compson, Norma Talmadge, Lon Chaney, Warner Baxter, Clara Bow, Ann Pennington.

Here, surely, was an ideal set-up for a photographer—something to dream about, in fact—a tremendous wealth of material, and virtually *carte blanche* for any experiments I wished to carry on.

But, despite all this, I DID NOT, DURING THIS TIME, GET ONE *PICTURE* WORTHY OF THE NAME.

The realization of this sorry fact came to me rather slowly.

For a long time I was distracted and amused, as all photographic beginners are apt to be, by the clever machinery of the camera, and by the ever-amazing darkroom miracle of development and printing. When these things became mere matters of useful routine, I still found ample scope for entertainment in dealing with all the colorful and exciting physical stuff in front of the camera—in juggling with sets and costumes, and in working with legions of beautiful and talented models. It was some time before I had an uneasy suspicion, which presently grew into a conviction, that, in all this

wealth of material, there was one all-important thing lacking. This was results—PICTURES.

This term "picture" would be variously defined by different people. I may shortly take a crack at defining it myself. But no matter how we define the term, there is one fundamental thing that a picture-maker always expects of his picture—that it will be *looked at*. He who makes a picture always assumes a public that looks at pictures.

This is the situation with practically all picture-makers, I am sure. There *may* be some photographers who are making their pictures "for all time," but I haven't met them. Most of us would a thousand times prefer the attention of the generation to the approbation of posterity.

On the basis of this crude and primitive definition, it was clear that my photographs were not pictures, for they were not being looked at. And, as a picture-maker, I had to have attention. I became sensitive and positively neurotic about this failure of my efforts to get over with the looking public. I hid myself inside my studio and anxiously scanned the faces of passers-by for reactions as they glanced toward the exhibit in my window. Unhappily, there were no detectable reactions.

One very definite sign of the effectiveness of a picture is that it is able to make the grade in salons and publications. I began to try to crash the salons and the magazines. With fatal unanimity, my prints were returned—with thanks. Still in the dark as to what the matter was, and growing a little panicky, I sent out more and more prints, squandering a young fortune in postage, and bombarding all exhibitions large or small, from Los Angeles to London, from Sitka to Cape Town.

Then suddenly, without warning, the thing happened. I had a picture accepted for the London Salon. Shortly afterward it was reproduced in *American Photography*, the *American Annual* and numerous local journals and salon catalogs. In the year that followed this startling event, the picture made a tour of most of the principal salons of the world and came home finally because there was no more room on the back for stickers.[1]

When I had recovered from the shock, I did that which I should have done long before: I gave thought to the matter. Why should "Salome" go over when all the others failed so ignominiously? Obviously there was no mere fluke involved. A fluke might explain an acceptance in the exhibit of

the Podunk Camera Club, but so august a body as the jury of the London Salon would scarcely accept a print without some sort of reason.

So I subjected "Salome" to a searching analysis. What did this print have that many others had failed to include? After long study I began to get a glimmering of definite differences in treatment and presentation that marked "Salome" off from the rest. From the study of my own accidental success I proceeded to an analysis of the works of other photographers who had attained salon recognition. Finally I arrived at the point where I should have started from—the study of the works of the master painters. Certainly pictures that have survived the criticism of the centuries must have elements of both effectiveness and universality. Both in the works of the photographers and of the painters I found confirmation for the things that I had marked in "Salome," and I began tentatively to shape up a formula that embodied these pictorial factors.

Now, there is something about the word "formula" that for some people seems to contradict the very essence of art. Art is unconfined—art is free—they aver, and must not be bound down by a formula. As a matter of fact, as Carl van Vechten has pointed out, every artist has a formula. Shakespeare had a formula, Michelangelo had a formula, Wagner had a formula. And today, Misonne has a formula, Steichen has a formula, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin each has a formula. By the formula the artist's material is put into a shape more readily assimilated by the looker or listener.

So I sought for a formula that would provide a means of securing *pictorial effectiveness.*

Armed with my new formula, I critically inspected my old pictures—and destroyed most of them forthwith. The formula made their pictorial shortcomings immediately apparent.

I began working along the new lines indicated by the formula. I had quite extraordinary success in getting recognition from the salons. They weren't all first-rate pictures—far from it—but I was able to provide for *effective presentation* of the second– and third– raters. A large proportion of the pictures which form the second half of this book have been seen in salons.

At the same time, I began trying the magazines with specimens of the new crop of pictures, and was successful in obtaining contracts for pictorial series from *Theater Magazine* and *Vanity Fair.*

DeMille began work on *King of Kings*, and I got the job as still photographer on the production. It was about eight months in the making, and I shot some four hundred dozen 3¼ x 4¼ negatives during this period. Mr. DeMille wished the stills to be pictorial studies instead of the usual type of record shot and lobby display. A selection of sixty of the best of these were bound into a fine volume, one copy of which at present reposes in the Vatican Library (where it is, I believe, the only photographic book to be so honored).

About this time, vague rumblings and distant squawkings were heard just over the Hollywood hills. These were the first faint rumors of the advent of the talkies. The good old days of unashamed magnificence were about done, and a new mechanistic era approached.

The Depression, the talkies, growing dissatisfaction, and possibly a tardy arrival at maturity, all contributed to terminate my stay in Hollywood. So I renounced the world, the flesh and the Devil, tore up my yard of crepe de chine, and sought a stern sequestered life in a small village on the shores of the Pacific.

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My experiences have not all of them been ennobling. But most of them have been enlightening. And out of them I have been able to derive the formula. It is definitely *my own* formula, which grew out of my own need to clarify what makes not only a good picture, but an *effective* one. However, I think that it is of sufficiently universal import to be of general usefulness.

I give you the formula now, although you will require the chapters following to fully understand its significance and application.

1. *The picture must, by its mere arrangement, make you look at it.*
2. *Having looked—see!*
3. *Having seen—enjoy!*

The meaning and use of the formula will be developed in the chapters that follow.

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1 This picture was called “Salome,” and it was shown in the London Salon, reproduced in *American Photography*, and included in the *American Annual* for 1928. Those inclined to research among melancholy relics of the outlived past may wish to look it up. It was definitely a bad picture, despite the recognition given it; but it contained effective picture elements and was thus able to give me guidance toward future acceptances and toward the clarification of the formula that is embodied in this book.

3.
THE PICTORIAL IMPERATIVE

The reason for relating "the melancholy tale of Me" in such prolix detail is solely to give the background for the formula and the varied ingredients of experience that went into its making. For this is no arbitrarily concocted formula spun from mere speculation. It is a tried and tested rule of working boiled down from years of experiment and practical experience.

I realized, after I had found and clarified the formula, that I had had it within my hand's grasp for a long time without knowing it. For it is a formula inherent in the nature and experience of all who work in the arts.

Why does an artist paint pictures, write symphonies, carve statues, tell stories? Is it because he finds joy and spiritual release in the mere doing of these things? Probably; but this is not the whole story. Is it because he makes his living after this fashion? No doubt; but there is still more to it than this.

Here is the third reason. It is a very significant reason, though it is generally disregarded. The artist persists in being an artist because he revels in the feeling that he may affect or influence people by his work. He does not demand approbation, but he does demand *notice and response*. The thought that he may through his work influence people and strike past their defenses to their secret emotions gives him a gratifying sense of power.

The Romantics conceived of the artist living in an ivory tower apart from men and affairs. It is barely possible that an artist could live and create in such sanitary isolation, but in order to get his human recompense for his labors, he must descend to the plane of the marketplace and note and rejoice in the effects of his works on other men. Nor is it enough for him to have his friends dutifully say "Ah!" He wants to have evidence of the effect of his works on the large, personally indifferent public. It is a matter of less importance to him whether the public is pleased, amused or angered at his

works; but *some* sort of reaction he must have, and on this his ego nourishes itself.

So it is with me. The high point and the great reward in my Greek adventure, as I realized later, was the libidinous gleam I detected in the eye of the Greek sailor who looked at the dancer in my cognac poster. And it was probably true that there was more of the real stuff in one of my cognac cuties than in all my mild and academic etchings. In the Salt Lake City episode, the big kick in making photographs of my young models did not come primarily from any aesthetic joy of creation but from observing the reaction of my models and others to the pictures I had secured.

The truth is that there is a great deal of the showman in every artist who is worth his salt. As such, he posts lurid signs, he beats on a gong, he yells himself hoarse—anything to halt the passing crowd and lure them inside his tent. Of course, if he is a wise showman as well as an energetic one, he will have something worthwhile to offer the crowd when he has gotten them inside—but that is another story and a later chapter.

So, being by instinct a showman, although I had not yet recognized the fact, I naturally gravitated toward Hollywood—the town in which reputations rose, prospered or fell on the basis of showmanship. Here I improved my education in the elements of showmanship, though I did not yet realize their close connection with picture-making. Especially valuable, as I discovered later, were the tips I picked up while working for that master showman, Cecil B. DeMille.

So when I began to clarify my formula for picture success, I found that it expressed itself in terms of showmanship. In speculations about art there has been too much said about the rules of composition and the motives and emotions of the artist. What counts finally and significantly is the reaction of the ultimate consumer—of the guy that looks at the picture. So we need to talk about the *laws of looking* and the *emotions of the looker.*

Whether you get anywhere with your picture-making depends ultimately on whether you can get anybody to look at your pictures. There are some pictures that no more require your active attention than does the pattern on the wallpaper; and there are others that demand to be looked at, that wrench your attention to them. Pictures must speak definitively and decisively in order to be heard, and when attention is obtained, they must have something to say.

Good showmanship is the basis of the first item in the formula. Let me quote it again:

1. *The picture must . . . make you look at it.*

"Must *make* you look at it." To all who come within its influence it says brusquely, "Look at me!" It must *command* you to look at it. It is this quality of an effective picture that I have designated as "the pictorial imperative."

Try this experiment. Take any photographic annual, or any similar sizable collection of pictures, and thumb through it quickly. You will notice that there are some pictures that, even at this rapid glance, arrest and grip your attention. Others are just a series of scattered gray splotches. It is these immediately effective pictures that, if they can live up to their promise, are destined to have the widest recognition. These are the pictures that contain the elements of "the pictorial imperative." You will probably notice one other curious thing as you thumb through the pictures. Some of the effective pictures seem to take effect by sort of a delayed action. You will pass such a one by along with the rest, and then, four or five pictures later, it will suddenly bring you up short. "Holy smoke! What was that?" and you will turn back to it. It is characteristic of effectively presented pictures that they often cause the beholder to do this sort of a "double take" (as the directors call it).

No picture that does not have this Imperative quality can be a first-rate picture, nor can it hope for any degree of pictorial success—no matter how excellent the technique involved or how interesting or pleasing the subject matter. Before a picture can win appreciation for itself on the basis of these latter points, it must—

RING A BELL,
SOUND A SIGNAL, or
SPEAK A COMMAND

Sometimes a picture sounds its signal in so distinctive a manner that it persists through a welter of conflicting and habitual impressions. Hence, the phenomenon of the "double take," which I mentioned above.

The attention of the looker may be likened to a poised stone on a hillside. It is a mass with considerable initial resistance or inertia. Feeble and tentative efforts fail to budge it. It takes a good hard heave to start it

rolling—and then it will keep going of its own accord. The Imperative is the force that overcomes the initial inertia of the looker.

Since the Imperative often has the effect of a *force* applied against the inertia or indifference of the looker, I shall frequently refer to it hereafter as the IMPACT. It is, indeed, a *blow* that starts things rolling.

What is the origin of the IMPERATIVE? What is the nature of the IMPACT? What are the things that make a picture *ring a bell, sound a signal*, or *speak a command?*

These questions we will consider in the next chapter.

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4.
ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT

Why do you look at some pictures and pass others over? Why do some pictures bring you up with a start and others attract no more attention than the familiar furniture that surrounds you in your home?

Some pictures, we have seen, speak in terms of the Pictorial Imperative. They demand to be looked at. If we decline to look at them we are left uneasy until we turn back and acknowledge the demand.

What is the nature of this quality in a picture that exercises so imperious a command over our attention? Does it have anything to do with subject matter? Or anything to do with pleasing aesthetic quality? The answer is in both cases, No. A picture exercises its demand on our attention *before* we know what it is about, and *before* we know whether it pleases us. *The first impression of a picture is merely a visual one*—a blob of black and white devoid of rational meaning or aesthetic import.

Some of these blobs of black and white we pass over and relegate to the background of our consciousness. Others startle us into awareness. What is the difference between one and another, that one, by sheer effect of its pattern, is able to compel our attention?

The answer is that a certain few patterns strike at deep-lying instinctive responses within ourselves. The Impact, the first blow of the picture against our consciousness, is purely *biological* in its effect.

To what sort of sense stimuli do animals and primitive men give their quickest and completest attention? It is to those stimuli that suggest DANGER. The first business of the race is to preserve itself; so the FEAR RESPONSE is the one that is most easily aroused. A strange, small, unidentified sound, some shape that moves menacingly in the dusk—and the nape of the neck bristles and every faculty is concentrated on the potential source of harm. No matter how far we have evolved from the savage and the beast, we are still, first of all, responsive to *fear-arousing*

stimuli. When we are alone at night in strange surroundings (and thus thrown upon our own resources) we are still very accessible to the primitive fears. Let but a shadow fall on the window or a mouse skitter in the partition, and stark terror traces a cold finger down our spine. We stop breathing; we strain eyes, ears, all our senses, to give the utmost attention to the thing that frightens us.

Herein we have the answer to the question why certain patterns of black and white have such strange power to grip our attention. Here is why: In looking at pictures, WE GIVE OUR ATTENTION FIRST TO THOSE SENSE IMPRESSIONS THAT REPRESENT THINGS THAT WE ONCE, FAR BACK IN RACIAL HISTORY, FEARED.

Therefore, the picture that claims our attention most immediately and completely is the one that, in its first visual impression, relates itself to ancestral fear.

To put it more simply, you look most quickly and instinctively at those pictures that suggest, in their mere black and white pattern, something that was *feared* by your ancestor that lived in a cave.

FORESTALLING A PROTEST

I anticipate that at about this point—particularly if you haven't read the foregoing paragraphs very carefully—you will start raising questions. "Look at pictures because I'm afraid of them?" you will say. "What a preposterous idea. Does Mortensen mean to tell me that I look at a picture of a child because I am afraid of a child? Stuff and nonsense!"

To which I would reply: "Take it easy! You will find that matters will be made much clearer a couple of pages later. So, read on—and hold your protests until you get a clearer idea of what I am talking about."

But, before you continue, be sure you understand this point: We are not now saying anything about the subject matter of the picture or what the picture represents. We are at this time concerned only with the *pattern of the picture*, the conformation of black and white blobs—the first thing that catches our attention, before we recognize anything in the picture.

THE FOUR PICTURE PATTERNS

Primitive man is surrounded by things that he fears. Yet the actual sources of these fears are few. Similarly, the visual patterns that stand for basic fears are likewise few in number.

There are *four* types of visual stimulus that directly call forth the fear response. These are:

1. Something that moves swiftly across our field of vision. We may not know *what* it is, but we know that it *moves*— and with swiftness and determination.
2. Something that approaches in a slithering, furtive fashion.
3. The threat of *sharpness*, whether of tooth or blade.
4. A massive stationary object that blocks our path. It may be man or beast or just an inanimate object, but it is compact and formidable and indomitably awaits our coming.

These four basic fears express themselves in *four basic picture patterns*:

1. The symbol of swift and menacing movement is the DIAGONAL. It also represents the primitive source of terror, the lightning flash. (*Figure 1*)
2. Secret and furtive movement is represented by the snake-like S-CURVE. Here we have the prototype of such fears as the serpent, the tiger that slithers through the grass, the hidden enemy that twists and turns. This is the real basis of the fascination of the so-called "Line of Beauty," which was described by Hogarth. (*Figure 2*)
3. The threat of sharpness is conveyed in combinations of TRIANGLES. (*Figure 3*)
4. The obstacle to our movement is expressed in a picture as a compact DOMINANT MASS. (*Figure 4*)

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Of these four *basic picture patterns*, the DOMINANT MASS is the one most frequently encountered. What causes a mass to dominate? There are several factors that contribute in giving dominance to the principal mass in a picture.

a. Unity. If several individuals are present, they gain strength by being linked together.
b. Cohesion. A mass is more dominating if it is compact, and devoid of projecting excrescences. Thus, the quality of coherence is expressed by a closed fist; the lack of it by an open hand.
c. Isolation. A mass gains strength if it is separated from confusing or extraneous elements of its surroundings or background.
d. Contrast. An important method of separating and differentiating a mass from its surroundings is contrast. Therefore a light mass is set

against a dark background, and a dark mass against a light background.

e. Size. Other factors being equal, a mass becomes more threatening and dominating the larger it is.

f. Stability. A mass is more formidable if it seems firmly planted and immovable. Hence the effectiveness and predominance of the pyramid form.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

The impact, then, falls into one of these *four basic picture patterns*:

1. THE DIAGONAL.
2. THE S-CURVE.
3. THE TRIANGLE COMBINATION.
4. THE DOMINANT MASS.

These four patterns, because of their relationship to ancestral fears, are the most effective means of winning instant attention to a picture.

Note that these four patterns are not mutually exclusive. They may be variously combined. Thus, a dominant mass of pyramidal form naturally embodies triangles. And triangles, in their turn, involve the use of the diagonal.

IMPACT AND CLIMAX

The reflex, biologically conditioned first response to the picture we have designated as the Impact. Although the Impact is the first part of the picture that hits you, its effect is not limited to this first momentary shock. When the picture is studied and known better, the quality of the Impact still pervades and dominates the whole. And often it is the part of the picture that stays with you the longest.

In the narrative arts, and in music, the element of Climax is something that is built up to gradually. Frequently the culmination is arrived at through a series of minor climaxes. But in pictorial art the reverse procedure is followed: *the Climax must arrive first*. In one instant of time the big moment of the picture must be *there*. In musical terms a picture may be expressed as follows: a big crashing *fortissimo* chord by the whole orchestra, followed by quieter and ever more contemplative music which dies away into musing silence.

Thus the Impact is both the beginning and its culmination.

AFTER THE IMPACT

After the sheer biological shock has diminished, the looker comes to the quieter processes of recognition and appreciation. This brings us to the second phase of the formula—and to our next chapter.

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5.
SUBJECT INTEREST

Let us take another look at the formula that I stated at the end of Chapter Two:

1. *The picture must, by its mere arrangement, make you look at it.*
2. *Having looked—see!*
3. *Having seen—enjoy!*

In the last chapter we saw that the first effectiveness of a picture—the command to look—is due to its black and white pattern. The ability of some patterns to stop you and make you look at them is due to their close relationship to primitive fear responses. We found, finally, that there are four basic picture patterns that have, in a particularly large degree, the ability to command your attention.

THE SECOND PHASE

We come now to the second phase of the formula: *Having looked—see!*

Having gotten the attention of your public by means of the mere pattern of your picture—the visual Impact—as we call it—you must now have *something to show them*. Your ballyhoo has gotten the audience inside your tent; you must now *bring on the entertainment*. You have gotten their attention; you must now *hold their interest*. Without solid interest to back up the picture's original command to look, the attention dwindles almost instantly, and the audience goes away annoyed, feeling that they have been cheated and that the picture is a fraud—as, indeed, it is.

The first phase of the formula dealt with the means of getting attention. *The second phase of the formula deals with means of holding interest.*

THE SUBJECT

The thing that holds our interest in a picture is primarily, of course, the subject—the thing that the picture is about. Specialists may be interested in how the picture was made, but the abiding and universal interest in any picture is simply the subject matter.

So in this chapter we will concern ourselves with different phases of *subject matter*, its requirements, varieties, and the methods of presenting it.

RECOGNITION

The basic, minimum requirement of pictorial subject matter is that it be readily recognizable. We want to be able to see, without delay, "what it is a picture *of*."

This is not solely for the sake of clearness. There is a positive pictorial pleasure that comes from the mere *recognition* of the subject matter.

The *Impact* of a picture, the initial "crash" of its pattern, commands our attention, we have seen, because of its association with a few basic *fears*. So, after the shock of the Impact has startled us into looking, there is a pleasure akin to relief in discovering that the thing that startled us is in reality something familiar and harmless. It is not—for example—a lion in the path, but something pleasantly feminine, that constitutes the DOMINANT MASS that so arrested our attention. The DIAGONAL that commands us to look at it (because of its relationship to primitive fears) is not a menacing movement, but merely the comfortably sloping roof of a cottage. And so on.

This factor of recognition is a very important one. If the Impact that gets the observer's attention is not immediately followed by recognition of the subject matter, he is certain to be resentful. This is the effect of the "puzzle pictures" so much favored by some photographers—pictures that, by camera angles, outré lighting or weird magnification, convert commonplaces into monstrosities. These pictures, instead of affording a pleasant reaction of recognition after the shock of the Impact, bring one to a bewildered standstill. Only after brain-racking thought and analysis does one realize that the outlandish contour represents—let us say—a frog's eye view of a familiar bathroom fixture. The looker quickly tires of such

guessing games and very soon declines to be bothered by them. At this stage he gratefully seeks out those pictures that reveal themselves simply and directly for what they *are*—pictures in which recognition follows immediately upon the Impact.

TYPES OF SUBJECT MATTER

This matter of recognition is essential. But recognition is not enough *of itself* to hold the interest of the observer. "Yes, yes," he will say impatiently, "I see that it is a picture of an eggbeater.—What of it?"

The observer must not be given the chance to ask this disconcerting question. The question is avoided if he is shown subject material that immediately calls forth emotional response. The types of subject matter that are surest in their ability to hold interest are those that are most broad and general in their emotional appeal. The eggbeater is a source of emotional concern to very few people—possibly only to eggs. So the looker rudely and justifiably says of the picture of the eggbeater: "What of it?" But such subjects as a human head alive with personality, a landscape full of mood, or a significantly distorted character portrait, these are general in their emotional appeal and are a perennial source of picture interest.

SOURCES OF EMOTIONAL APPEAL

Since successful pictorial material must be so broad and general in its appeal, it follows, of course, that it must relate itself to *very few* basic human emotions. Only in the field affected by these few emotions are human likes and dislikes fairly uniform and predictable.

Cecil B. DeMille used to say that there were just four elements needed in a motion picture to ensure its success with the public. As he was a notable producer of box-office successes, his formula must strike near to the truth. The essential elements according to DeMille were: sex, sentiment, religion and sport. Being a clever and resourceful showman, he generally seasoned his opuses liberally with all four elements.

When I was endeavoring to clarify my formula for picture-making, I evolved my own list of three themes that I had found to be surefire in their subject appeal. Before I mention and describe these basic themes, one

warning must be given. All summaries such as these should be regarded merely as suggestive simplifications, *not as hard-and-fast rules*. Human emotions resist rigid classification, and gaily leap the fences of the categories into which you try to shove them. However, the list that follows will be found to express the source of subject interest of at least ninety percent of the pictures in this book.

Here, according to my analysis, are the three principal sources of subject interest in pictures:

SEX.
SENTIMENT.
WONDER.

These three we may rate unquestionably as the "big three" among picture themes. It is not difficult to suggest additional categories; but I have found these to be the most practically useful and to include nearly all effective pictorial subject material.[2]

THE SEX THEME

Of the three, sex is undoubtedly the most primitive and direct in its appeal. It covers a wide scope, running into outright pornography on one hand, and shading imperceptibly into sentiment on the other.

The nude, of course, is the subject material that is commonly associated with the theme of sex. The fact of nudity is secondary, however. A picture may be sexual in its import without including the nude. On the other hand, sex is not *always* the primary interest when the nude is used. (See, for example, "The Priestess," in the pictures that follow, in which the primary interest is Wonder.)

It is interesting to note that women are just as much attracted to the theme of sex when presented in the form of the feminine nude as men are. The attraction in this case is vicarious, rather than direct. Their pleasure comes from *imagining* themselves placed in a situation where they would receive the same admiration that goes out to the theme of the picture. Therefore, the attraction of the sex theme (excepting only its directly pornographic use) is in no way limited by the gender of the looker.

It is probably no longer necessary, as it was in pre-War days, to explain and justify the use of the sex motive in pictorial art. Psychologists have recognized sex as a great energizing influence in life. As such, it is bound to play a large part, directly or indirectly, in all forms of art.

Typical and varied instances of the use of the sex theme are seen in "Frou Frou," "Torse," and "Portrait of a Young Girl." Of these, "Frou Frou" is the most direct in its appeal. "Torse" takes a middle ground, and "Portrait of a Young Girl" shows sex softening into sentiment.

THE SENTIMENT THEME

Despite the modern tendency to sneer at sentiment, it is still a very potent influence in life and an ever-appealing theme in art.

Lowell defines sentiment as "emotion precipitated in pretty crystals." It is concerned with the softer, tenderer things of life. Sentiment is often the meeting ground of humble material and lofty emotions. In a sentimental mood we see familiar things touched with grandeur, and remote things made intensely interesting and personal.

Those equivocal moments when laughter and tears seem to be in even balance are sentimental. Sentimental also is the characteristic Romantic tendency to read emotion and mood into the changing lights, shadows and shapes of inanimate Nature.

The phases and mutations of sentiment are innumerable, but it is always readily recognized and appreciated. A few characteristic manifestations of the theme are the following:

The softer aspects of sex.
Children.
Hardships of humble life.
Domestic life.
Animals.
Landscape.
Appeals to national pride.
The glamour of the past.

Characteristic variations of the theme of sentiment will be found in the following pictures: "Piety," "À la Gare," and "My Aunt."

THE WONDER THEME

This theme is also broad in its scope. Part of its field is that mentioned by DeMille as “religion.”

That which is unknown, uncertain or mysterious in its working is always a subject of interest. And despite the swagger of our modern learning, there is still much that remains very mysterious to us today. Night and its shadows surround us during half the period of our life on earth, and at least half the things about us remain strange and mysterious in their working. We all of us are conscious of forces that move behind the shadows. The “Powers of Darkness” are still with us.

The fascination of the wonder theme is universal, though some persons are reluctant to concede it lest they betray how flimsy this fiction called civilization and learning really is. If nothing more, it provides us with a welcome escape from the world of hard, bright facts into a land of shadow and surmise where one may live for a while with the creatures of the twilight.

The wonder theme appears in many mutations. It is ingenuous and childlike in the form of fairy stories. It takes a humorous turn in grotesque art. It may turn morbid in an interest in the mal-forms of life: the perennial interest in sideshow attractions such as the fat lady and the man who writes with his toes is another manifestation of the wonder theme. It may draw near the fringes of fear in the supernatural and witchcraft and demonology. And the final manifestation of the wonder theme is that silent Mystery of Mysteries, Death, before which we all pause appalled and fascinated.

It has been a theme of particular interest to me. Many examples will be found among the subsequent pictures. A few instances are: “Death of Hypatia,” “The Vampire,” and “Belphegor.”

INCOMPLETE PICTURES

I must at this point reiterate one point more emphatically and explicitly. Impact and subject interest are *both* vital parts of a successful picture, and *both must be present*. A picture in which one of these elements is lacking is only part of a picture.

Both types of incomplete picture are, unhappily, quite common. One cries out to be looked at, and then has nothing to show you. The other has something to show you, but never gets looked at. The picture that has Impact but no Subject Interest is very annoying. The one that has Subject Interest but no Impact is merely innocuous—and a sad waste of good material.

You may avoid these unhappy, half-way pictures in your work by making sure that your pictures provide both Impact and Subject Interest—that is, by fulfilling the first two phases of the Formula.

"WOLF! WOLF!"

In view of this interdependence of Impact and Subject, I am now better able to clear up an objection that may have occurred to some of you in perusing the last chapter.

"First shock art" is a term that critics have applied to certain aspects of Modernism. This is art that gets you to look at it by sheer assault on the senses. It startles you—and then has nothing more to say. It screams "Wolf! Wolf!"—and then fails to produce the animal.

This superficial sensationalism is undoubtedly—and unfortunately—a frequent symptom of modern art. Let it not be thought that, by my emphasis on the importance of Impact, I am here advocating any mere "first shock art." I do insist that the "first shock" (or Impact) *is* important and essential as a means of overcoming the initial inertia of the looker. But the first shock—as we have seen—is not all there is to a picture. And, furthermore, the Impact must be in *pictorial* terms and of a form *compatible with the subject matter*. So, for example, we would not seek to make Mona Lisa more effective by putting green flash bulbs in her eyes, or by outlining her frame with neon lights. The first shock of such procedure would undoubtedly be terrific; but the Impact would bear no conceivable relationship to Mona Lisa.

PRESENTATION OF THE SUBJECT MATTER

Despite the use of an Impact and the choice of broadly appealing Subject Matter, your photography may still be lacking in true pictorial qualities. Your picture is arresting (owing to the Impact), and momentarily interesting (owing to the choice of a theme of wide emotional appeal); yet it is not a picture that you return to many times. This lack grows out of certain faults in the *presentation of the subject material.*

This is a fault particularly involved in the straight realistic presentation peculiar to the snapshot and the candid camera. It is also characteristic of press photography. The mention of the press gives the clue for the reason for the fugitive interest of the snapshot and the fruits of the candid camera. News pictures and news stories all carry a *dateline* saying this is what happened at a certain time in a certain place. Despite the violent interest created by the up-to-the-minute news (Love Nest, Royal Romance, and Nude Corpse in the West End), a newspaper of two months ago seems as quaint and outmoded as something from another century.

In a similar manner, candid camera products, snapshots and such pictures *all carry a dateline*—not a printed one, to be sure; but a perfectly obviously dateline inherent in the very nature of the picture itself. As a result, they are branded as having been made at a certain time and a certain place, and fade from memory as rapidly as yesterday's newspaper.

Therefore, though the great themes like Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder may always be depended upon to arouse interest in a picture, in order to make this interest permanent and enduring, *the dateline must be eliminated.*

For instance, an assiduous candid camera fan might, on successive weekends, get such shots as the following: (1) front-row impressions of a striptease artist practicing her trade; (2) children playing in the street; (3) close-ups of a voodoo ceremony in Haiti. He has here included the themes of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder, respectively, and for this reason his pictures would be certain to arouse interest. But—unless, by some happy accident, the dateline has been left off—they would scarcely have longer life than the news picture of today's beauty contest winner.

ELIMINATING THE DATELINE

The thing that makes a picture permanently interesting to you is not the realistic, accurate record it gives you of the accidents of wrinkles and wens of a certain person, and the accidents of light and shade on a certain June day, and the accidents of background of a certain town in Ohio. That which continues to hold your interest in any given subject matter is the kernel of permanent and universal reality that you are able to wangle from the irrelevant accidents of wrinkles and wens, of light and shade, and of the circumstances of the Ohio town.

Themes of such universal import as Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder naturally demand to be presented in as universal terms as possible. This universality is achieved by *getting rid of the dateline.*

The following suggestions are offered as means of getting rid of the dateline and of securing a stronger impression of universality in the presentation of the subject matter:

Some things inevitably bring up suggestions of time and place. AVOID THEM—if you wish your pictures to carry an interest for more than the moment:

1. Unnecessary realism.
2. Representation of episodes.
3. Action pictures.
4. Accurate period customs.
5. Specific personality.

There are certain devices by which the impression of universality may be heightened. Some of these, as I have noted, are characteristic of the work of great painters.

Raphael frequently utilized the device of *downcast eyes*. He was thus enabled to keep mere personality from becoming too aggressive and insistent.

A common device with El Greco was *elongation* of faces and figures. By this means he escaped from the here and now of realism.

The well-known *stiffness and primness* of Holbein's figures is another method of setting the pictures aside from merely realistic representation.

Among painters of today, we may mention Rockwell Kent as one who effectively escapes from the here and now of literal representation. This he accomplishes by the heroic mold of his characters and by the avoidance of episode.

I am not suggesting these specific methods as necessarily useful to you as a photographer. I mention them to show how artists have recognized and dealt with the problem of eliminating the dateline and representing the Subject Matter in universal terms.

"IS," NOT "DOES"

The best general formula for the elimination of the dateline and the realization of the universal qualities of the subject matter is indicated, I believe, in the phrase above.

"IS," NOT "DOES." Try to make your subject matter express itself by what it *is*, not by what it *does*. A picture in which your subject matter is very busy *doing* something is almost certain to lose its charm after you have seen it once or twice. Whereas one returns again and again to a picture in which the subject simply sits still and *is* completely and fully *itself*. Pictures in which the subject does something are apt to fly off on tangents of action and episode and casual accidents of time and place. But pictures in which the subject matter expresses itself solely in terms of *being* draw inward to an ever more unified conception.

Let me illustrate the difference between an "is" picture and a "does" picture in specific terms. There was once an artist who painted a picture of an elderly lady. Evidently a subject of sentimental interest. How should he represent her? He could show her in a bright print dress picking roses in a garden. Or he could show her dressed in her stylish best, descending the stairs. Or he could show her wearing an apron and peeling potatoes in the kitchen.

He could have done any of these things and made a bright, episodic picture, full of momentary interest. But he did not choose to make a "does" picture of it. Instead, James Abbott McNeill Whistler placed his model, dressed in somber garb of no particular period in profile in front of a nearly plain gray wall, and painted the old lady for all time as "My Mother." This is a thoroughgoing example of an "is" picture. There is nothing "doing" in

the picture; there is neither action nor definite reminder of time and place; everything is concentrated on what the model "*is*." Everything is repose and quiescence, and thereby becomes the passive mold which each may fill with his own interpretation. As a pre-eminent, universal symbol of motherhood, this is probably the world's favorite sentimental picture.

THE PICTURES

The formula "*IS*, NOT DOES" has governed the treatment of the subject matter in the pictures that follow. This is a principle that I have held to ever since I began exhibiting in salons. I have always striven to keep out of my pictures any definite hint of time and place, and particularly all suggestions of "smartness" or "up-to-date-ness." None of the pictures, so far as I know, betrays by any detail the date of its origin. For this reason, although they span a period of twelve years, they are, I believe, unusually uniform in spirit and manner.

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2 I have excluded the element of "sport," popular though it is, because it introduces factors of contention, conflict and action that belong more properly to drama and narrative than to pictorial forms.

6.
YOU AND THE PICTURE

Once more let us return to the Formula and refresh our minds about it. Here it is again:

1. *The picture must, by its mere arrangement, make you look at it.*
2. *Having looked—see!*
3. *Having seen—enjoy!*

The last couple of chapters have taken us through the first two phases of the formula. We saw that the first problem was to *make people look* at your picture. To do this, you must embody—in its black and white pattern—a command to look. The picture patterns that are most effective in stopping you and making you look at them are those that are most closely related to primitive fear responses. There are four such patterns that, because of this relationship, are particularly able to command your attention: the DIAGONAL, the S-CURVE, the TRIANGLE, the DOMINANT MASS.

When attention is secured, you must reward it with *subject matter of wide emotional appeal*. There are three themes, we saw, that are specially dependable as sources of subject interest. These are SEX, SENTIMENT, and WONDER. These three themes are most lasting in their appeal if they are presented in such a manner as to eliminate the “dateline” of actual time and place.

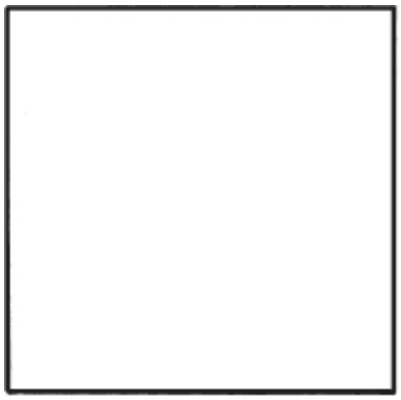

Fig. 5

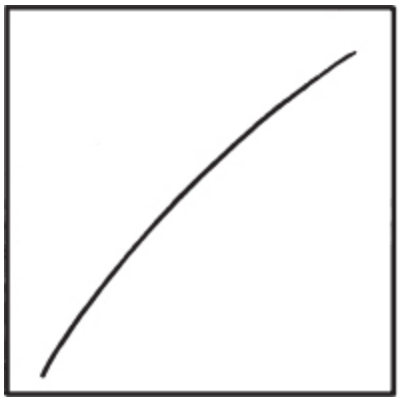

Fig. 6

THE THIRD PHASE

This brings us to the third and final phase of the Formula: *Having seen—enjoy.*

In terms of the formula, you have, so far, (1) gotten your public's attention by means of the reflex "shock" (Impact) of the picture pattern; (2) rewarded them with interesting subject matter. This point is as far as many pictures can bring their public. Such a picture gets their attention; they look and find the subject reasonably interesting—then, without further ado, they pass quickly to the next picture. This is what happens to news pictures and to superficial pictorial works.

But a picture, in order to be completely satisfying, must bring its public one step further. After being commanded to look and after being shown interesting subject matter, then *the looker must be given an opportunity to participate in the picture.*

YOU AND THE PICTURE

This point of *participation* in the picture requires some explanation.

You may protest that you don't participate in a picture, you just look at it. But I ask you to consider more carefully what happens when you look at a picture. After you have oriented yourself and found out what the picture is about, does your mind remain *a passive receptive blank*, upon which the picture imprints itself as on a photographic plate? Surely not. On the contrary, your eye—and therefore your mind—is, when it looks at a picture, never wholly at rest, but moving actively through the picture.

Fig. 7

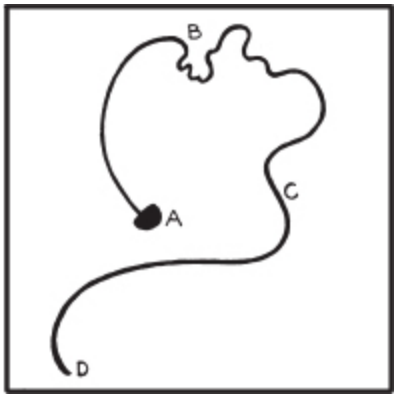

Fig. 8

Let me illustrate: Only when looking at a blank piece of paper, such as *Figure 5*, does your mind remain completely a blank. Let it be given a single diagonal line to play with (*Figure 6*), and your eye swoops up it.

Given a curve (*Figure 7*), your eye moves along it, caresses the curve at the top, and sinks down the other side. With a more complex contour, such as *Figure 8*, the eye rises from the impact A, delays over an episode at B, moves deliberately through the curves at C, and finally sinks at D.

By this active motion within the picture, sliding swiftly along some line, retarded a moment by a bit of detail, then racing onward again—noting, comparing, enjoying—the looker *participates* in the picture and makes it part of his *experience.*

This participation in the picture reacts on the subject matter, and lifts it to greater importance and interest. By skillfully guiding the looker in his experiencing of the picture, the artist enriches the subject matter, confirms and develops it.

Many different sorts of experience are likely to be encountered by the mind as it moves through the picture. I cannot attempt to talk about them all within the limits of this chapter; but I will discuss a few of the more familiar and generally useful types.

MOVEMENT AND HINDRANCE

In movement and hindrance we have really two different and opposite sorts of picture experience. But I discuss them together, because each is a necessary complement of the other.

In the preceding paragraphs I have given, I believe, some sort of idea of the experience of *movement* within the picture. (See *Figures 7* and *8*.) One point needs to be stressed, perhaps, lest there be any misunderstanding about it. When I speak of "movement within the picture" I have no reference to what is known as an "action picture"—the depiction of action performed by the subject. *The "movement" I refer to is that of the eye and mind of the looker*, tracing contours, dallying over detail, etc., as I described above. There may actually be more "movement" of this sort in a picture of a perfectly passive subject than there is in an action picture of a pole-vaulter stopped in the middle of his flight.

Movement is the simplest of the looker's experiences within the picture, and the most necessary. For it is through movement that the eye is led to other types of experience. Without movement, the eye rests, stodgy and

becalmed, somewhere near the center of the picture, and experiences little else than *ennui.*

Movement takes place most freely and frequently along *contours* and *outlines*. In order to guide movement, a contour does not need to be continuous or unbroken. Indeed, as we shall see, the eye enjoys taking leaps over considerable gaps in the contour. If the contours are cleverly contrived, they will lead the eye through a sort of "grand tour" of the picture, turning it back gently whenever it ventures too near the edge, and guiding it repeatedly into, through and around the subject matter. A frequently useful device in guiding movement within a picture consists of the *folds* of drapery or costume.

A more subtle and less insistent type of movement is that caused by *gradation*. This type is particularly noticed in a picture in which the device of "dodging in" has been utilized. In such a case, the darkened corners subject the eye to gentle pressure, guiding it back into the picture. Even without contours to guide it, the eye will move along a plain surface if there is gradation to lead it on.

There are several things that are apt to impede seriously or even prevent movement in a picture. One of these is the presence of "traps"—small, enclosed light areas such as those that occur between the crooked elbow and body.[3] A trap sucks the attention into it and prevents the eye from moving on.

Another likely source of interference with movement is the *corners* of the picture itself. Each corner is a sort of "trap," in fact, and exercises the same kind of harmful restraint. Movement, therefore, needs to be carefully sidetracked past the corners; for, once it is drawn into a corner, there is very little chance of extricating it again.

Care should be taken also against running the movement out of the side of the picture; it finds its way back with the greatest difficulty. If the movement does not encounter the side at too abrupt an angle, however, it may be successfully carried along the edge and presently diverted back into the picture.

This harmful interference with movement that we have just been discussing should not be confused with various types of temporary *hindrance* that lend zest and variety to the looker's experiences within the

picture. Movement that is too obvious, too easily accomplished, too cut-and-dried, rapidly becomes boring. So a wise picture-maker incorporates a few hindrances and obstacles on the line of movement. These moments of resistance make the final accomplishment infinitely more pleasant. This resistance, once we have appreciated it, becomes as essential to us (to indulge in gastronomic analogy) as the tang of bitterness in beer and the crispness of celery.

This resistance takes various forms. I mention two of the more familiar ones. One sort of resistance is encountered when the guiding contour thins out to a mere suggestion or momentarily disappears entirely. This "losing and finding" of the outline is always a pleasing experience. If an actual gap occurs, the eye will gladly take the jump and enjoy doing it—particularly if the direction of departure and the "landing place" are well defined.

Another sort of resistance is that introduced by *complexity* of contour or by bits of *detail*. Moments of complexity and detail force the eye to *slow up* its movements, and thus bring variety into the experience within the picture.[4]

Movement and resistance should occur in the picture in wise alternation, for each experience gains in pungency by the contrasting presence of the other.

TACTILE QUALITIES

Probably the most primitive of all sense impressions is that of the sense of touch. It is, therefore, particularly charged with profound emotional associations.

Looking at pictures is, of course, basically a *visual* experience. But it is possible to render pictures—particularly photographic pictures—in such a way that surface textures and details arouse distinct *tactile* associations. Owing to the primitive character of the sense of touch, these tactile associations are among the most powerful and profound of the experiences within the picture.

Tactile associations greatly enhance the emotional background of the three subject themes that we considered in the last chapter. Note, among the pictures that follow, how the SEX interest of "Portrait of a Young Girl" is

increased by the tactile quality of the *smooth shoulders*; how the impression of *softness* of "Mr. Wu" increases its SENTIMENTAL interest; and how, in "The Heretic," the painful tactile associations of the *nails* enhance the WONDER theme.

These associations of the sense of touch naturally cause the mind to *linger* over them, since touching implies lingering. Tactile qualities are, indeed, a type of hindrance or resistance to movement within the picture. As such they should be limited to small, isolated details or spots, since a picture that is all resistance allows no opportunity for free movement.

Herein lies the reason for the weakness of so-called "Purist" pictures that give a literal and complete all-over rendering of the texture of skin, of a cabbage, or of an old fence post. It is, of course, exceedingly doubtful that such subject matter is ever worthy of representation. But, assuming that it is, the Purist's picture fails to give so true an impression of *the real tactile quality of the texture* as the less literal version that limits full detail to a few climactic "tarrying points." The complete detail in *all* parts of the Purist's version prevents the eye from moving and arriving at an appreciation of the texture in its tactile qualities.

CONFIRMING FORMS

When the mind leaves the contemplation of the mere subject matter and begins to move through the highways and byways of the picture, it runs into numerous subsidiary shapes and configurations of line. As it lingers over these, it gains an impression of *enriched physical experience*. Since it comes to them immediately after leaving its contemplation of the subject matter, it encounters with particular pleasure those shapes that *confirm the implication of the subject matter*. By such experiences the subject matter itself is enriched and brought nearer to the universal.

Discussion of details from a couple of pictures will make this point clearer.

Note, for example, "Johan the Mad." This is a WONDER theme, dealing with torture and aberration of mind. This torture of mind is clearly shown in the face—where we first look—in the expression of the eyes and the *twisted* mouth. Leaving the face and moving through the picture, we quickly come upon *confirming forms*. The twist of the mouth is confirmed

and repeated—in another medium—in the grimly twisted and knotted headdress. Further on in the picture, the sense of aberration is given increased emphasis by the arbitrary diagonal that cuts across the base, and by the erratic placement of the title.

Another use of confirming form is found in "Niccolo Machiavelli." Note, in this picture, the little ribbon that hangs down from the right side of the cap. Make the experiment of placing your thumb over this detail and note how the picture is weakened thereby. This ribbon confirms, in its own medium, the impression of evasiveness and slyness that is given by the side-glance of the model. The little quirk at the end of the ribbon does the trick.

ECHOES

"Mary had a little lamb,
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go."

It is not merely the sentiment of this immortal verse that makes it pleasant, but the repetition of the familiar sounds. "Snow . . . go"—young and old alike rejoice in the click and jingle of the sounds that so quaintly finds similarity in matters apparently unrelated.

The eye, in its movement through the picture, takes similar pleasure in finding shapes that jingle and rhyme. These *rhymes in form* also serve, like the rhymes in poetry, to tie together parts that are remote from each other.

These repetitions of echoes of form may be regarded as a special case of "confirming forms." In this case we have one form more or less literally confirming another, rather than rendering in another medium the implication of the subject matter.

Investigation will show many instances of echoed form in the pictures that follow. One example is found in "Machiavelli." Note that the motive of the curled tip of the ribbon that we mentioned in the last section is distinctly repeated in the cloud form in the background.

Rhyme or echo of form is a very pleasing effect, but discrimination must be used in employing it. Its use should be isolated and definite. Too many echoes in one picture are merely confusing, monotonous and lacking

in point. The effect is precisely that of a hollow room that echoes and re-echoes until the sense and identity of the original sound is lost in the confusion.

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3 For further details on “traps,” see the writer’s *The Model* (San Francisco: Camera Craft, 1937), 58.
4 Particularly good instances of the use of various kinds of resistance and hindrance are found in “Woman of Languedoc,” page 125.

7.
PUTTING THE FORMULA TO WORK

At the risk of trying your patience, I must once more quote the formula. The formula is at the heart of the book, and it is essential that you have it clearly in mind before we proceed to discuss its application to concrete problems. And so, ladies and gentlemen, I present, for its positively final appearance on this stage,

THE FORMULA:

1. *The picture must, by its mere arrangement, make you look at it.*
2. *Having looked—see!*
3. *Having seen—enjoy!*

The first problem dealt with in this formula for pictorial effectiveness is that of overcoming the initial inertia of the observer and of *making him look at your picture*. The thing in a picture that makes it able to command attention at first glance is not its subject matter, but its mere black and white *pattern*. This initial crash of the picture pattern that wakes you up and makes you look, we have designated as the IMPACT. There are a few picture patterns that are outstanding in their ability to command attention. These are patterns that bear close relationship to *primitive fear responses*. Four of them are particularly qualified in this way: the DIAGONAL, the S-CURVE, the TRIANGLE, the DOMINANT MASS. Pictures based on these patterns have the strongest impact and are most certain to command your attention.

The second phase of the formula deals with the problem of holding the observer's *interest*, once you have gotten his attention. To do this, you must provide him with *subject matter*. Of course, not all sorts of subject matter are equally interesting. Subject matter is interesting in proportion to the emotional response it creates. We must, therefore, seek subject matter of

wide emotional appeal. There are three subject themes that, because of their universal emotional background, are especially dependable sources of subject interest: SEX, SENTIMENT, and WONDER. These themes are most lasting in their interest if, in their presentation, they are kept free from crass and realistic implications of time and place.

In the third phase of the formula, we considered methods of bringing about the looker's *participation* in the picture. Unless it is to be of merely temporary and topical interest, the looker must find *experience* within the picture that enriches and enhances the subject matter. There are, we saw, numerous *sorts of experience* that give the looker a sense of participation in the picture: MOVEMENT and HINDRANCE, both essential and complementary to each other; TACTILE QUALITIES, through which the pungent experience of the sense of touch enhances the emotional suggestion of the subject matter; CONFIRMING FORMS, forms that reiterate, in their own abstract medium, the implication of the subject matter; ECHOES, repetition, with slight variations, of the same formal motive in various parts of the picture.

YOU AND THE FORMULA

This, then, is the formula, the formula which I originally developed as a means of improving my own work and of gaining a larger audience for it. But, as I have found by experimentation with photographic students of mine, it is capable of wider and more general application. I believe this formula embodies a method by which *any photographer of fair intelligence and decent technical competence may definitely better his pictures and secure wider recognition for them.*

But merely reading about the formula will not do you any good. You must learn to *apply* it. So in this chapter I offer some general suggestions about using the formula as a basis of self-criticism of your own work.

Obviously, general suggestions are the only kinds of suggestions that would be useful. The specific application to your own specific problems is up to you. You must put forth your own initiative in applying the formula. Without this initiative, the formula is about as likely to benefit you as the General Law of Relativity or the Third Law of Thermodynamics.

APPLYING THE FIRST PHASE

The first phase of the formula, you will remember, deals with the IMPACT —the ability of the picture to get your attention.

Try this experiment with your own pictures. Take a specimen selection of your prints, not less than a dozen. (Or follow the same procedure with proofs that you contemplate making into prints.) Set the prints (or proofs) against the wall upside-down. Or else strew them casually about the floor, wrong-side-up or crosswise, or however they happen to land. Now turn your back on them and after a brief pause look suddenly toward them. The purpose of this strange performance is to enable you to see the pictures freshly and impersonally, not as your own pictures at all. Give *the group as a whole* a glance of not more than two seconds' duration and turn away again.

Now, without looking back, try to recall which pictures, in that single hasty glance, caught and held your eye. Having made your selection mentally, turn around again and set these pictures in a pile by themselves.

These selected pictures are the ones with the best qualities of IMPACT and we will use them further for purposes of analysis. For the moment, turn your attention to the discards, the pictures that failed to get your attention. Let us see what is wrong with them.

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Probably they look like *Figure 9*. Or possibly they resemble *Figure 10*.

Pictures that lack IMPACT are probably marked by one of the three following characteristics:

1. Scattered or speckled blacks and whites. There is no dominating pattern. This is the special fault of *Figure 9*. This is a frequent failing in landscapes.
2. General lack of contrast. The picture, in other words, is grey all over. Pattern, if it is there, is not conspicuous enough. This is the fault demonstrated in *Figure 10*.
3. More specifically, the complete absence of any of the four basic picture patterns: DIAGONAL, S-CURVE, TRIANGLES, or DOMINANT MASS.

Of the four basic patterns, DOMINANT MASS is undoubtedly of the most frequent occurrence. Often, among pictures that are lacking in IMPACT, one may detect traces of incipient Dominant Mass—that is, of would-be Dominant Mass that for some reason fails to dominate.

Failures of Dominant Mass may be due to various causes. Here are some of them:

1. Lack of *size*. In order to dominate, a figure must seem formidable and impressive. A small figure in a large area of picture dominates with difficulty.

2. Lack of *unity*. Instead of a single mass, there may be several unrelated and unconnected masses.
3. Lack of *cohesion*. A mass will not dominate if it spreads about instead of being concentrated.
4. Lack of *stability*. Form loses its ability to dominate if it does not appear firmly planted and stable. Forms that dominate are usually broader at the base than at the top.
5. Lack of *isolation*. Forms are strongest when they stand alone. The isolation of the central form may be damaged by subsidiary forms that crowd in upon it from the sides or by over-insistent backgrounds.

The method of eliminating these faults is, I believe, largely self-evident —i.e., conscientious endeavor to keep them out of your pictures. There are at least five different stages in the making of a photograph when you have the opportunity to eliminate these and similar faults, and to ensure your picture having the best possible qualities of IMPACT. These are the five stages:

1. Preliminary planning. A picture that is thought out in advance and possibly planned in a thumbnail sketch can avoid many of the faults that weaken the IMPACT of a casual, unplanned potshot.
2. During shooting. In this stage the essentials of the picture are set and established, so when you look at the potential picture on the ground-glass or in the finder of your camera, make sure that it contains elements of IMPACT.[5]
3. Selection of proofs. In weeding out the proofs, opportunity is given both to eliminate those that are hopelessly deficient in IMPACT and to pick out those in which the IMPACT may be strengthened by subsequent operations.
4. During projection printing. Various types of control applied during projection—local printing, dodging, vignetting, elongation, etc.—offer opportunity for enhancing or altering the quality of the IMPACT.[6]
5. Control processes. Such processes as the Paper Negative and Bromoil Transfer allow much control in dealing with factors of the IMPACT.

APPLYING THE SECOND PHASE

In this roundabout manner we return to the experiment that we started a couple of pages back with a dozen of your prints. We were left with two piles of pictures: one group of pictures being distinguished by positive qualities of IMPACT; the other group lacking in IMPACT, save as it may be enhanced in one or two cases by the use of Projection Control or other control processes.

Let us now continue with the group that you selected as having immediately arresting qualities of pattern.

Set them up in a row, right side up this time, and look them over carefully. The next problem, in terms of the formula, is that of subject matter and its presentation. Consider the subject matter of each picture. Decide *candidly*, unswayed by any personal element, whether the subject matter in each case is really of *general emotional appeal*. Note in particular whether any of them fit into the categories of SEX, SENTIMENT, or WONDER. No matter how excellent the qualities of IMPACT, relentlessly throw out everything in which the subject matter is lacking in general emotional appeal.

This will leave you—I hope—with a detectable remainder. Subject this remainder to another scrutiny. Look this time for bald and realistic notes in the subject matter that set a definite "dateline" on the picture. If the "dateline" is present in obvious literal reminders of time and place in costume and background—throw the picture out.

If you have any pictures left at this point, you are now ready to undertake the third phase of the formula.

APPLYING THE THIRD PHASE

The third phase is concerned, as you will remember, with the various devices that heighten the looker's sense of *experience* in the picture.

So now examine your remaining pictures (if any) with these things in view. You are no longer concerned with literal subject matter, so you may be able to get a fresher impression of the pictures by looking at them in various unaccustomed ways—upside-down, crosswise, close at hand, far

away. Pay attention not to subject matter, but to lines, contours, patterns and abstract shapes.

The most essential of experiences within the picture are those of *movement* and *hindrance*. Every picture should provide both. Therefore, look to see whether your pictures contain these necessary elements. Is the eye led through and around the picture by a fairly continuous contour? Does this contour hold the eye within the picture and guard it against falling into the corners? On the other hand, is the contour made interesting and varied by moments of resistance and hindrance? Is the contour kept from being too smug and easy by bits of complexity or detail that cause the eye to tarry a moment?

Discard the pictures that fail to pass this test. Any picture that passes this test, having survived the preceding ordeal, is probably a very good one.

Confirming forms and *echoes* are not such absolute necessities, but their presence will definitely strengthen any picture and increase its effectiveness. If you find them well used in your picture, you may give it a still higher mark.

The five stages of control that I mentioned earlier in this chapter are all useful in applying the third phase of the formula to your work.

1. In the stage of preliminary planning, the main contours may be mapped out and provision made for the use of confirming forms.
2. During shooting, as I have said, the essentials of the picture are permanently established. At this stage, the principal elements of movement and hindrance must be settled. Note in particular the arrangement of drapery and the placement of detail, for these things are important in guiding movement and creating hindrance.
3. The selection of proofs offers opportunity for censorship. Proofs in which movement is lacking or confused, or is too smug, should be discarded—unless later stages of control provide means of salvaging them.
4. By “local printing” during projection of the negative considerable control may be exercised over the quality of the contour. Weak contours may be strengthened, and contours that are too smug or mechanical may be made more interesting by means of “losing and finding.”

5. Paper Negative, Bromoil Transfer, and similar processes also provide much opportunity for adjustment of contours and emphasis of elements of Confirming Form.

USING THE FORMULA

Don't be surprised or dismayed if, at first, none of your pictures come through this searching examination. The test is a very stringent one, if you have applied it honestly and sincerely; and a picture which survives it must have very definite elements of excellence.

The formula, if it is to benefit you, *must be used, and used constantly*. Put all your pictures through the ordeal. Every time that you look over a bunch of your proofs—put the formula to work.

Throw pictures away recklessly. Every photographer saves too many pictures. Without complication, tear up your proofs and decimate your prints. And having gotten rid of them—forget them. Remember that every inferior picture that you discard raises the average excellence of those that remain.

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5 I have elsewhere dealt with two important phases of this stage of picture-making; i.e., in *Pictorial Lighting* (1935) and *The Model* (1937).

6 I have described some of these methods in my volume on *New Projection Control* (1942).

8.
PREFACE TO THE PICTURES

Pictures, if they are good pictures, should stand on their own merits, without benefit of comment.

So it is not with the idea of bolstering them up, but simply to show the formula under actual working conditions, that I include a few remarks on each of the pictures that follow. I believe that the general application of the formula to the pictures will be so simple and obvious to you, once you have gotten the hang of it, as to require little explanation. So only in the first few pictures do I give detailed analysis in terms of the formula. Thereafter I limit my comment on each to some particular phase or problem of pictorial effect that the picture especially illustrates.

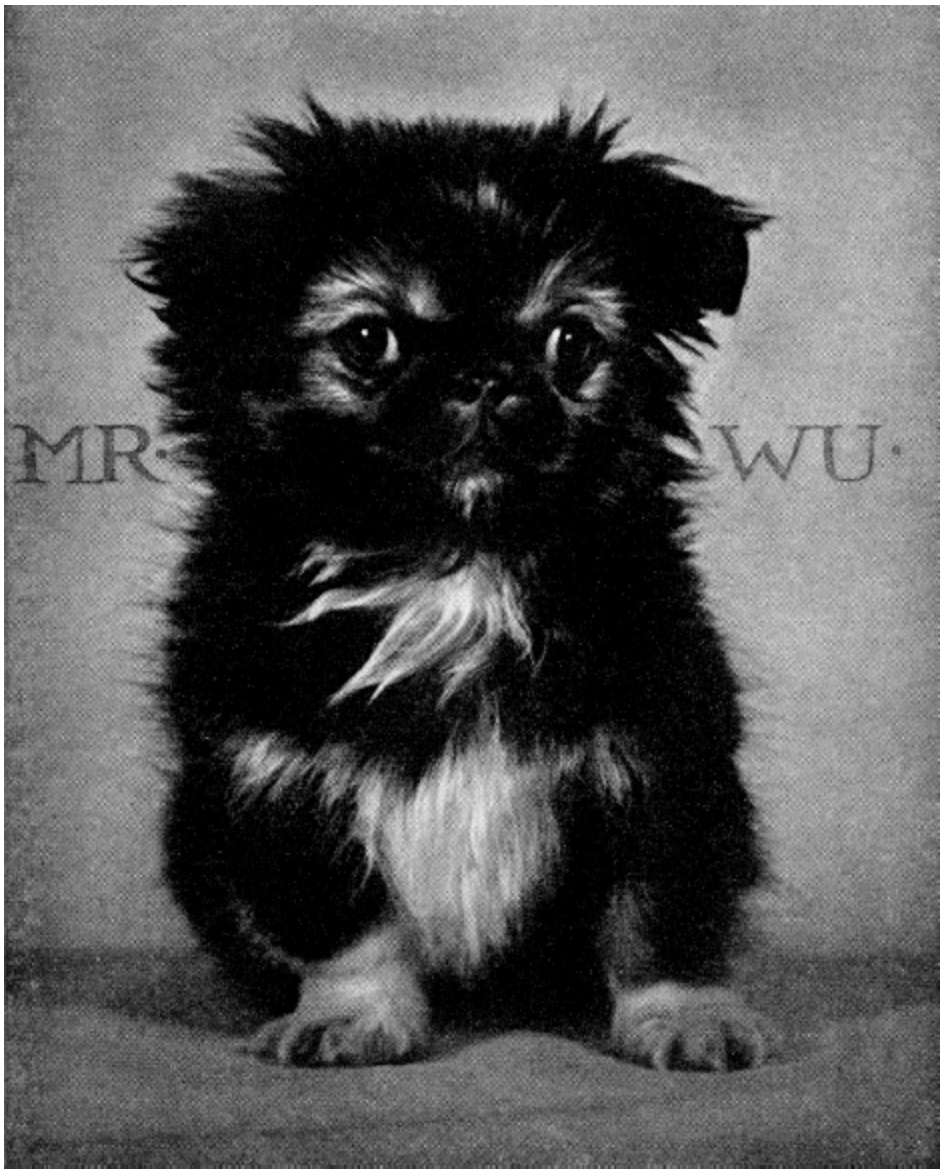
‡ ‡ ‡

THE PICTURES

MR. WU

The Impact is created by DOMINANT MASS of a large and imposing sort. Obviously, SENTIMENT is the basis of the subject interest.

This picture furnishes a good instance of the importance of the factor of *recognition* in the appreciation of subject matter. A great deal of the pleasure in the picture lies in the humorous contrast between the ferociously bristling DOMINANT MASS and the very small bit of dog flesh it is found to represent.


MR·
WU·

GIRL OF SMYRNA

The DOMINANT MASS in this picture (as in “Youth”) is strongly supported by the S-CURVE pattern. Here is the SEX theme, with a considerable tincture of the Romantic theme of WONDER (the lure of far places).

Contrasting with the soft swing of the skirt and body is the abrupt zigzag pattern of the darker elements. Note that these darker and weightier elements (hair, sash, lute and scarf) are evenly distributed on the two sides of the picture.

MY AUNT

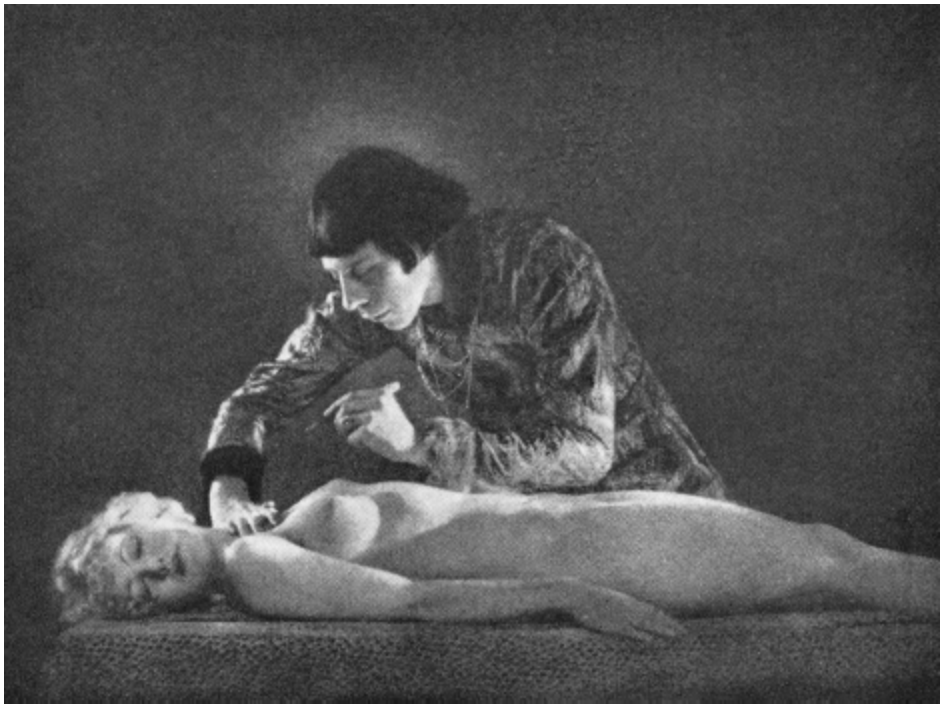
DOMINANT MASS is the basis of the Impact, which is here enhanced by the isolation of the figure and the strong notes of *contrast.*

The piquant expression and the humorously sentimental theme receive amusing CONFIRMATION in the little explosion of decoration at the top of the hat. The bits of detail at the shoulders provide moments of HINDRANCE and break the otherwise too smug pyramidal contour. Note how the little loops of lace are ECHOED on the hat and at the back of the neck.

THE ANATOMY STUDENT

DOMINANT MASS of a broad and stable pyramidal type. SEX and SENTIMENT both contribute to the subject interest.

MOVEMENT is interesting and varied. The eye moves swiftly up the outstretched arm of the woman, tarries a moment over the complexer details of the man's right hand, travels more deliberately along his right arm to his face, from which the intensity of his glance throws the eye to the face of the woman. Going back to the student's face, the eye is carried along the curve of the left arm to the hand, where the direction of the gesture once more forces attention to the woman's face. TACTILE QUALITIES considerably add to the eye's experience, particularly in the contrast between the smooth flesh and the rough texture of the coat.



PAGANINI

Here is DOMINANT MASS that, in spite of its erratic contour, is firm and compact. To this are added elements of the S-CURVE.

The erratic contour is in keeping with the sense of melodrama and the temperamental morbidity that are associated with the name of Paganini. This angular contour is developed throughout the picture. Note the active zigzag that brings the eye, by a series of jerks, up the bow, up the fiddle, up the broken strings, into the face. Note the brilliant whites that explode near the center—the eyes, the two points of the collar, the handkerchief, the series of lights on each knuckle. The motive of the curled broken strings is RE-ECHOED in the disorderly wisps of hair. Note how the melodrama is increased by the extreme amount of dodging.

NICOLO
PAGANINI
GENOA
18·27

MOONLIGHT MADONNA

The Impact here is based upon DOMINANT MASS. Note the stability and compactness of the central shape, and how the rock and jug both contribute to the pyramidal shape.

The universal quality of the subject interest (SENTIMENT and WONDER) is enhanced by the passive posture and downcast eyes. This is definitely an "is" picture rather than a "does" picture. (See Chapter Five.) Note that the Impact in this picture gains its end by the simple power of its central form rather than by elements of contrast which would have been at variance with the quiet emotion of the subject.

PARAPLUIE

The Impact is furnished by the large bat-like DOMINANT MASS of the umbrella. The theme here is SEX, seasoned with humor after the French formula. Despite the very literal appurtenance (the umbrella), the extreme simplification inclines the treatment toward the universal.

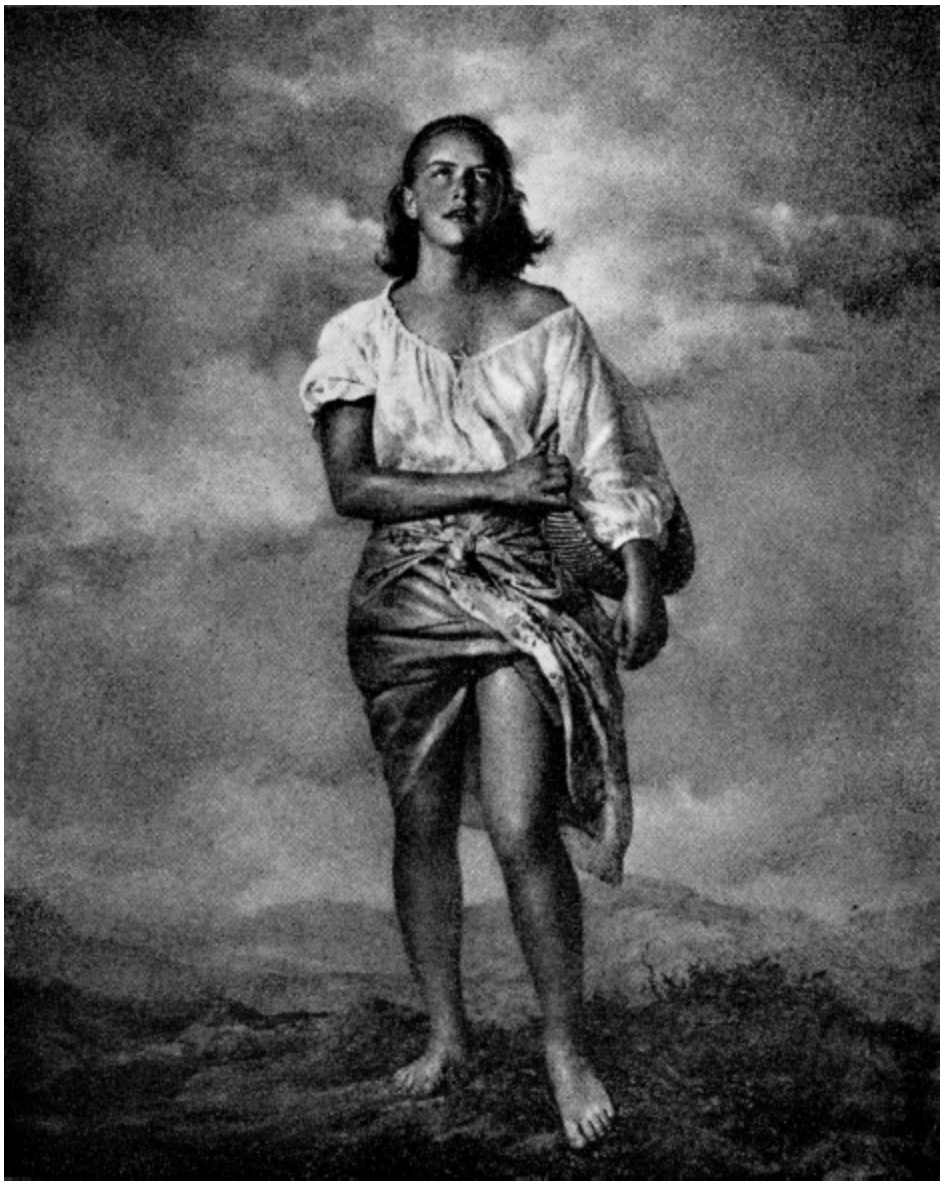
The dignified, geometrical black mass of the umbrella is given a raffish, whimsical touch by the tiny dangling strap. Cover this up, and note how important it is to the picture.

Meteorological note: The rain was supplied by the simple expedient of dragging a piece of fine sandpaper lightly across the surface of the negative.

GIRL OF THE HIGHLANDS

DOMINANT MASS with wide pyramidal base is here the source of the Impact. The theme is a SENTIMENTAL one, primarily, but there is also an element of SEX.

The eye MOVES swiftly up the smooth flesh of the straight legs, encounters HINDRANCES in the arrangement of the drapery about the waist, and moves on again to the face along the simpler lines of the blouse. The mountain valley is ECHOED in the neckline, and the firmly planted foot finds CONFIRMATION in the right angle of the elbow.



THE MOVING FINGER

Here is Impact based on a group of triangles. A light triangle with its point toward you, and a dark triangle with its point away from you—these are the major elements. In addition there are many other lesser triangles interlocked with one another. There is a dark triangle in the left-hand corner and a lighter one in the right-hand corner. The face is triangular; so also are the hand, the sleeve and the headdress.

GIRL WITH CORSET

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS combined with a suggestion of S-CURVE. The theme of the subject interest is SEX, to which SENTIMENT is added by the frankness and ingenuousness of the expression.

The eye MOVES swiftly through the smooth passages of flesh and finds HINDRANCES in the detail of the corset. Further hindrances are provided in the TACTILE SUGGESTIONS of contrasting textures—flesh contrasted with corset, and flesh contrasted with hair.

PISTACHIO GIRL

The S-CURVE is an important factor in the Impact of this picture. Stable and firmly based DOMINANT MASS is here also.

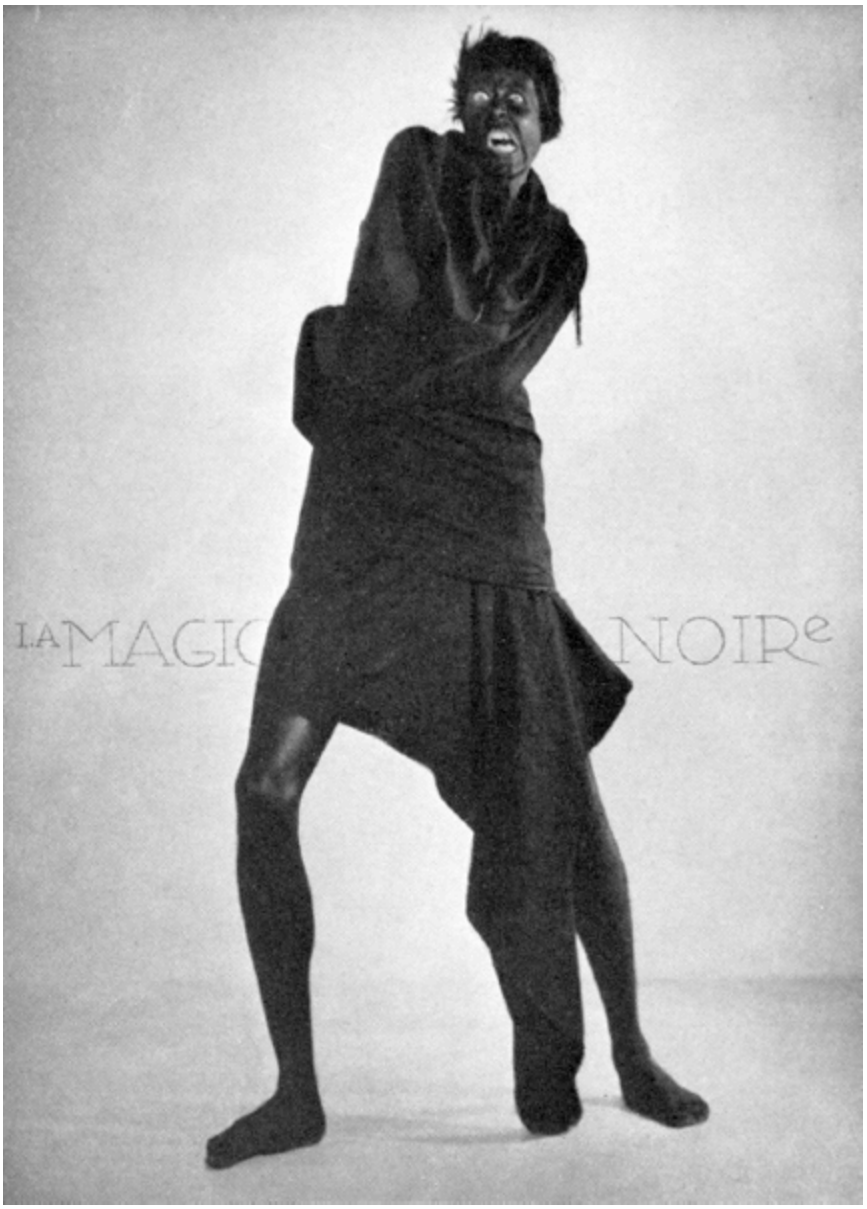
The freedom and vitality of the subject are realized in the MOVEMENT of the eye, which is led through swinging curves and figure eights. The eye follows up the right leg, is swept clear across the body by the curve of the apron, leaps across to the left hand, swings swiftly up the left arm, dallies a moment over the face, circles the head and descends the right arm. From the right hand it jumps to the curved fold in the front of the apron which turns it upward to the basket; it circumnavigates the basket until the left hand swings it downward again to the curve of the apron, whence it arrives, exhilarated and slightly dizzy, at its starting point.

BLACK MAGIC

Here is DOMINANT MASS strengthened by the menace of TRIANGULAR SHAPES. In the harsh contrast and the spread legs there is a suggestion in the Impact of something clawlike and spiderish.

This is a WONDER theme—the menace and fascination of the unknown.

The MOVEMENT is in keeping with the character of the theme. The eye is jerked by a series of abrupt zigzags up to the startling and ferocious climax of the face. Note how the long dangling drape is ECHOED by the tiny tendril that hangs from the left shoulder, and is further repeated in inverted fashion by the upstanding wisp of hair.


LA MAGIE NOIRE

WHIRLWIND

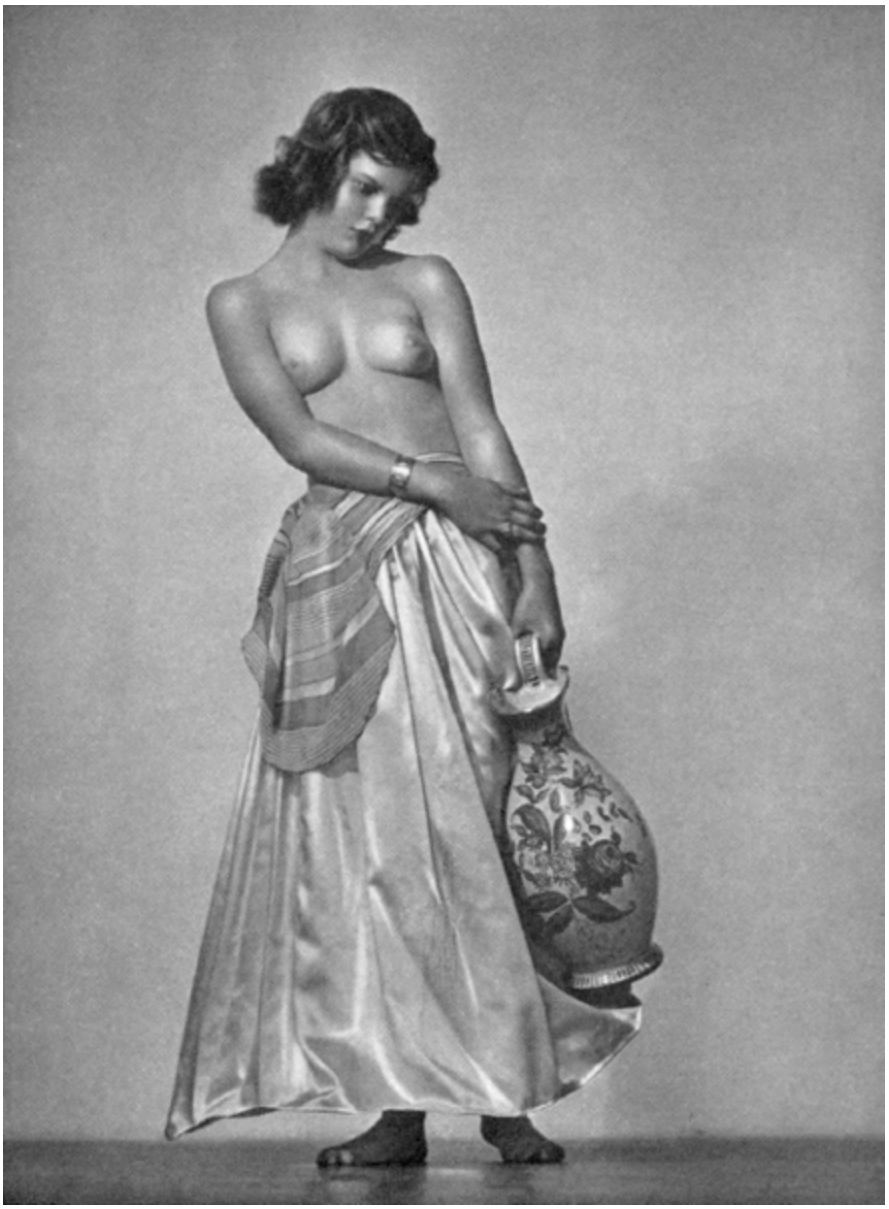
This is a firm, compact DOMINANT MASS, with a suggestion of the DIAGONAL.

The tightness of the lower part of the mass throws greater emphasis on the free contour of the hair and the exaltation of the expression. The swirl of the hair is a sort of CONFIRMING FORM to the sense of release and wild freedom of which the face tells. The same thought is RE-ECHOED in the cloud shapes in the background.

TAJ

The Impact is based on DOMINANT MASS of an extremely cohesive type. Note the absence of loose ends; everything is closely knit and bound together.

This cohesive quality makes MOVEMENT within the picture particularly swift and easy. The principal elements of HINDRANCE are those afforded by the full detailed rendering of the scarf and jar.



THE GLORY OF WAR

Less than any of the other pictures in this collection does this print express a COMMAND TO LOOK. The IMPACT is decidedly faulty, owing to scattered blacks and whites and the absence of any clearly defined pattern. But, like a good press photograph, it is able to hold interest, if seen, by its shocking subject matter. And the scattered blacks and whites, which so vitiate the Impact, are found to be curiously expressive of war's wanton destruction of normal, solid facts and virtues.

YOUTH

Here is DOMINANT MASS, with the S-CURVE as an important supporting pattern.

The latter pattern—the Line of Beauty of Hogarth—is particularly adapted to the theme of the SENTIMENTAL glorification of serene and poised Youth. Despite the use of the nude, Sentiment is probably a stronger element of subject interest in this picture than SEX.

YOUTH

THE WARLOCK

Here are DIAGONAL and DOMINANT MASS, made more powerfully arresting by the strong *contrast*. This is a WONDER theme, of course—the Supernatural—the world of demons and witches.

The impression of speed is built up by the many converging thrusts along the diagonal—the broomstick, the forearm, the cords in the neck, the flapping drapery.

THE TANTRIC SORCERER

The Impact is based on a powerful DOMINANT MASS, made additionally strong by the suggested DIAGONALS. There is here something of the arresting quality of a match kindled in the dark.

Clearly, this is an example of the WONDER theme in subject material. The emotional quality of the theme is enhanced by the sinister suggestion of the lighting.

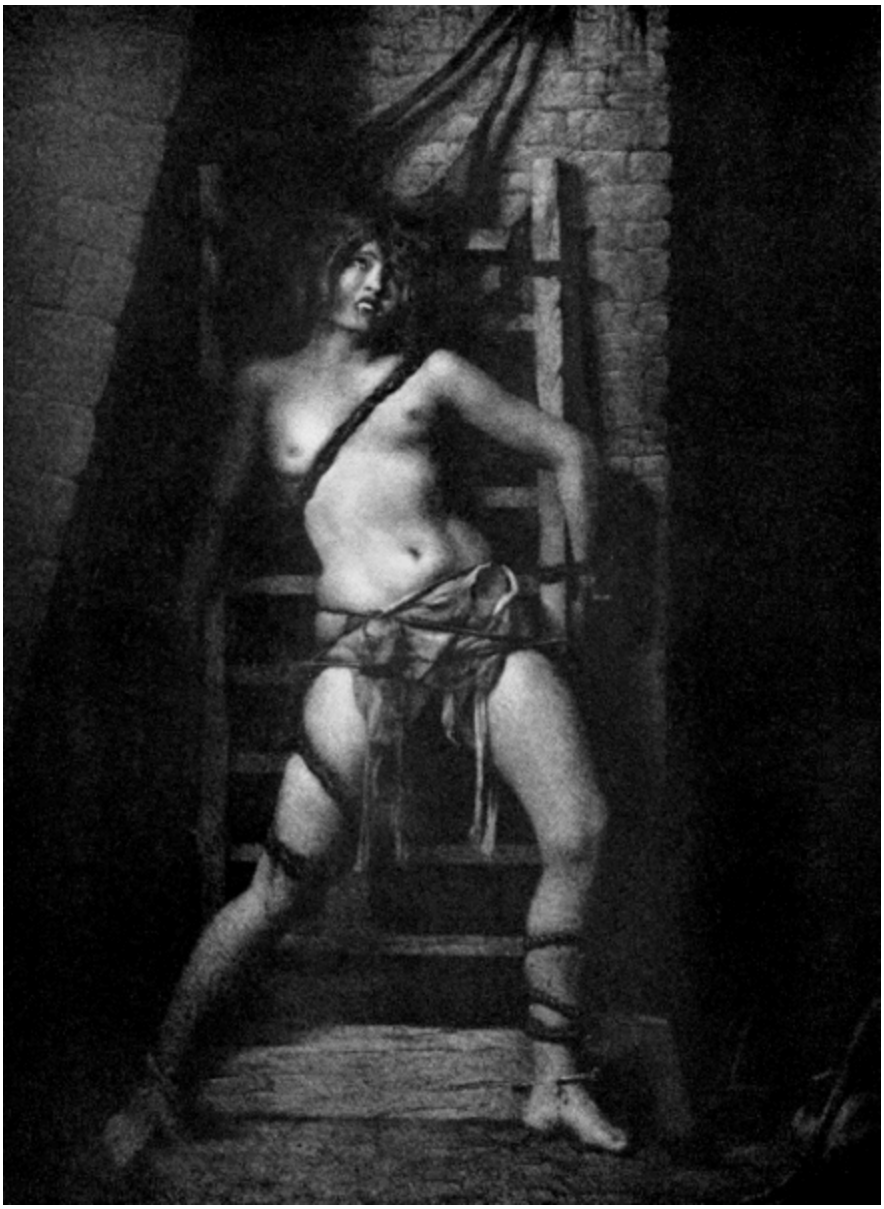
The MOVEMENT in this picture swings the eye in a sort of spiral—up the hand, diverted by the crooked forefinger along the top of the headdress, thence down into the face. The eye leaves the picture by the jagged line of the shoulder, and is caught and tossed again into the picture space. There is interesting HINDRANCE in the involved detail of the scepter and the complex contour of the headdress. Note how the motive of the curved forefinger is ECHOED in the decoration of the scepter, in the drooping mustaches and in the highlights on the brow.

THE HERETIC

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS, which is made additionally powerful by the strong contrast between body and background.

The theme, owing to its relationship to the dark machinations of witchcraft, may be classed as WONDER, which is here considerably tinged with SEX interest.

The darkness of the surrounding areas insistently returns the movement of the eye to the central figure. The hindrances to this movement are sharp and definite, the smooth contours of the limbs being repeatedly hacked across by the intersecting lines of the bonds. There is a strong TACTILE QUALITY in the way that the bonds bite into the flesh. Note that the points where the tactile suggestion is most painful—i.e., the nails through the ankles—are prevented from becoming too dominant and literally revolting by being placed in deep shadow.



CESARE BORGIA

DOMINANT MASS supported by a DIAGONAL is the basis of Impact in this picture.

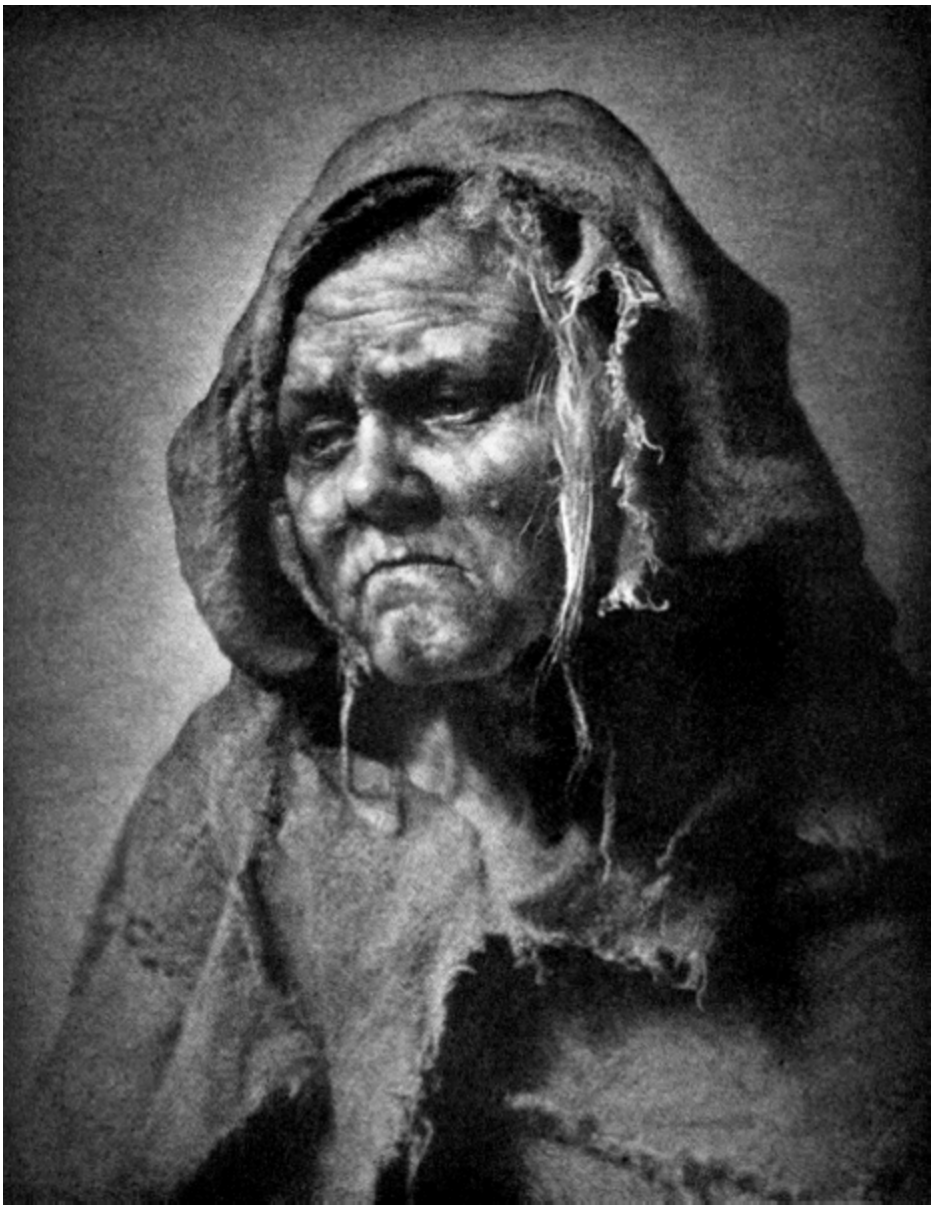
The important and characteristic element of the wry curve of the smile finds CONFIRMING FORMS in the shape of the highlights in the hair, in the curl on the left side of the face, and in the shadowed fold in the shirt front.

CESARE
BORGIA

EVENING

DOMINANT MASS of a simple pyramidal type. The theme is SENTIMENT.

Here all the forms CONFIRM the impression of the weight and weariness of the years—the drooping mouth, the heavy eyelids, the flaccid, dangling wisps of hair.



FRAGMENT

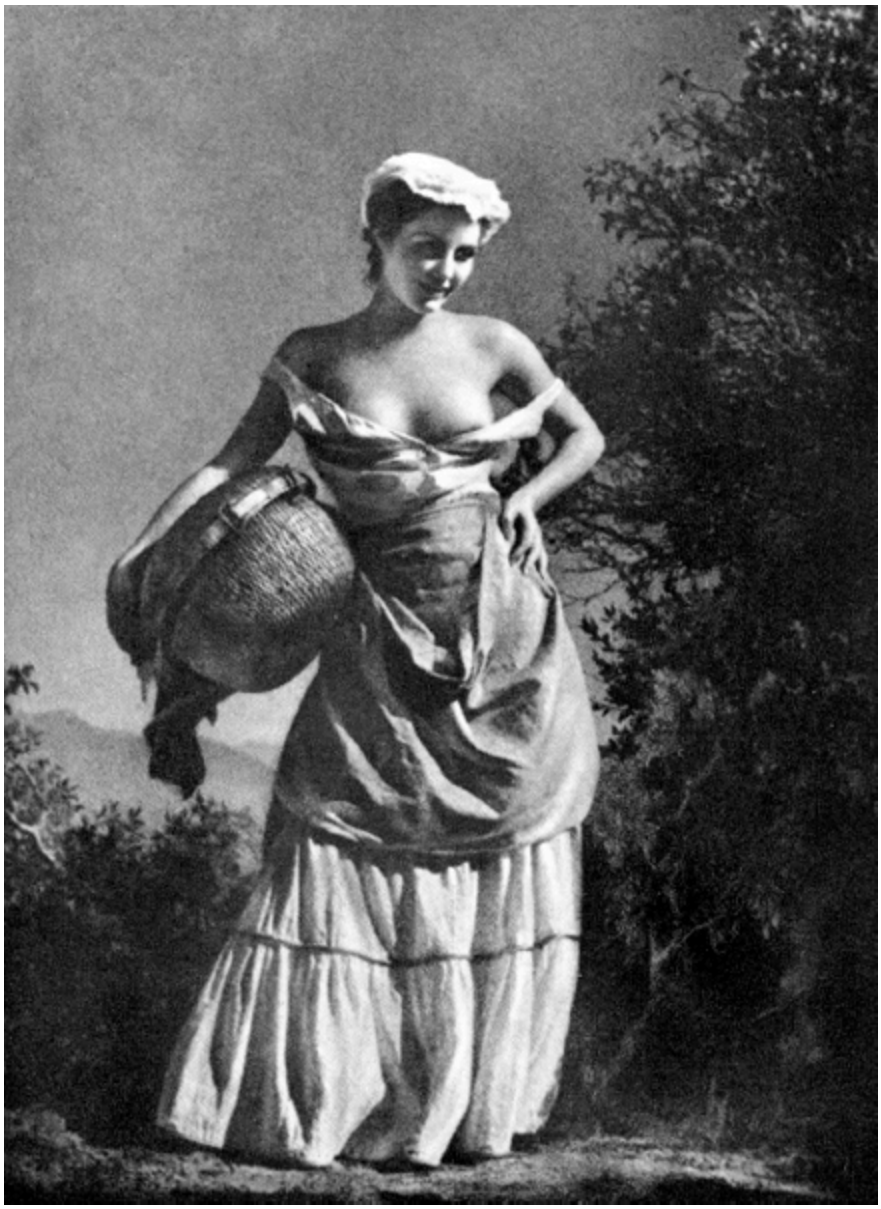
SEX is not so much the subject interest here as the SENTIMENT evoked by brave and gallant remnants of the past. The transformation of a living body into an apparent fragment of statuary helps to bring it nearer to a universal symbol. By this drastic mutilation, all realistic suggestions of time, place and personality are wiped out, and nothing remains except the eternal mystery of the female body.

The MOVEMENT of the eye within this picture is particularly swift and incisive. There is no hint of a single vacillating or doubtful thought. The line on the right side of the torso swings the eye up with a powerful crescendo to the apex of the broken arm. From here it moves more deliberately down the body. Additional elements of hindrance are provided in the TACTILE suggestions of the scars and nicks in the marble.

WOMAN OF LANGUEDOC

We have DOMINANT MASS with a definite hint of the S-CURVE in the swing of the body. SEX is the theme—not so much in a specific sense as in terms of universal fecundity—rich soil topped by the eternal woman.

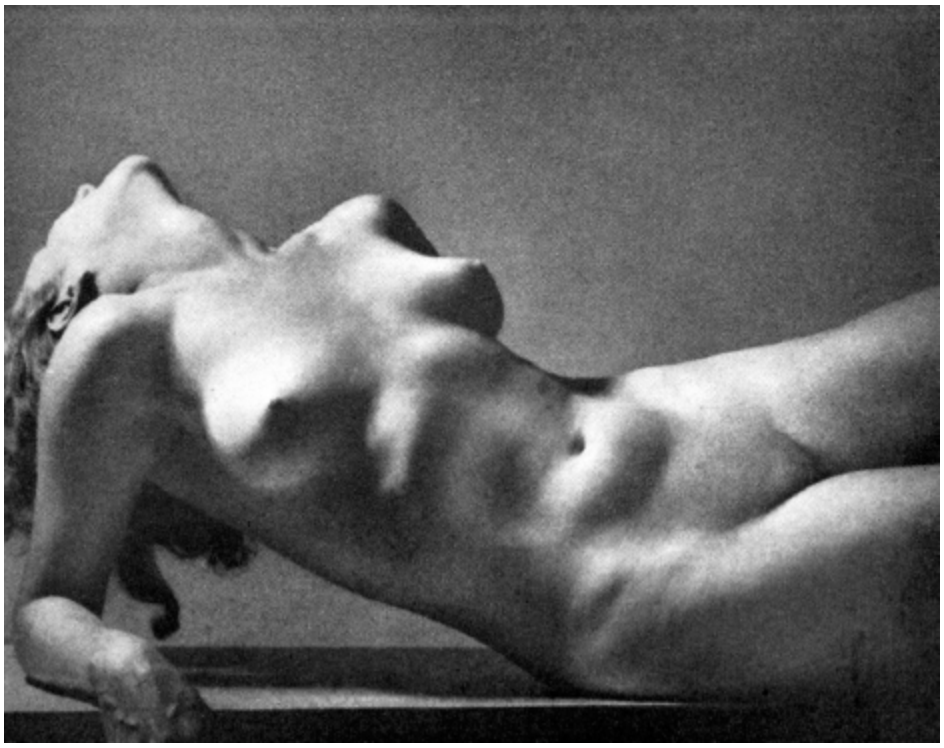
Note the variety of the HINDRANCES—the *detail* of the basket, the *complexity* in the folds of the apron. There is a prevalence of small triangular motives which create a sparkling scintillant effect.



TORSE

Here is impact based on DOMINANT MASS with some suggestion of the DIAGONAL.

The theme of the subject interest is principally SEX. Increased HINDRANCE is given by the undulations of the plastic lighting, which also increases the TACTILE qualities. Further tactile effects are achieved by the small area of literal detail in the veins of the hand and in the contrast between the texture of the hair and the shoulder. Note the manner in which the shape of the breasts is RE-ECHOED by the shoulders and the upthrust chin.



PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG GIRL

DOMINANT MASS with a suggestion of the DIAGONAL. The theme is more SENTIMENT than sex.

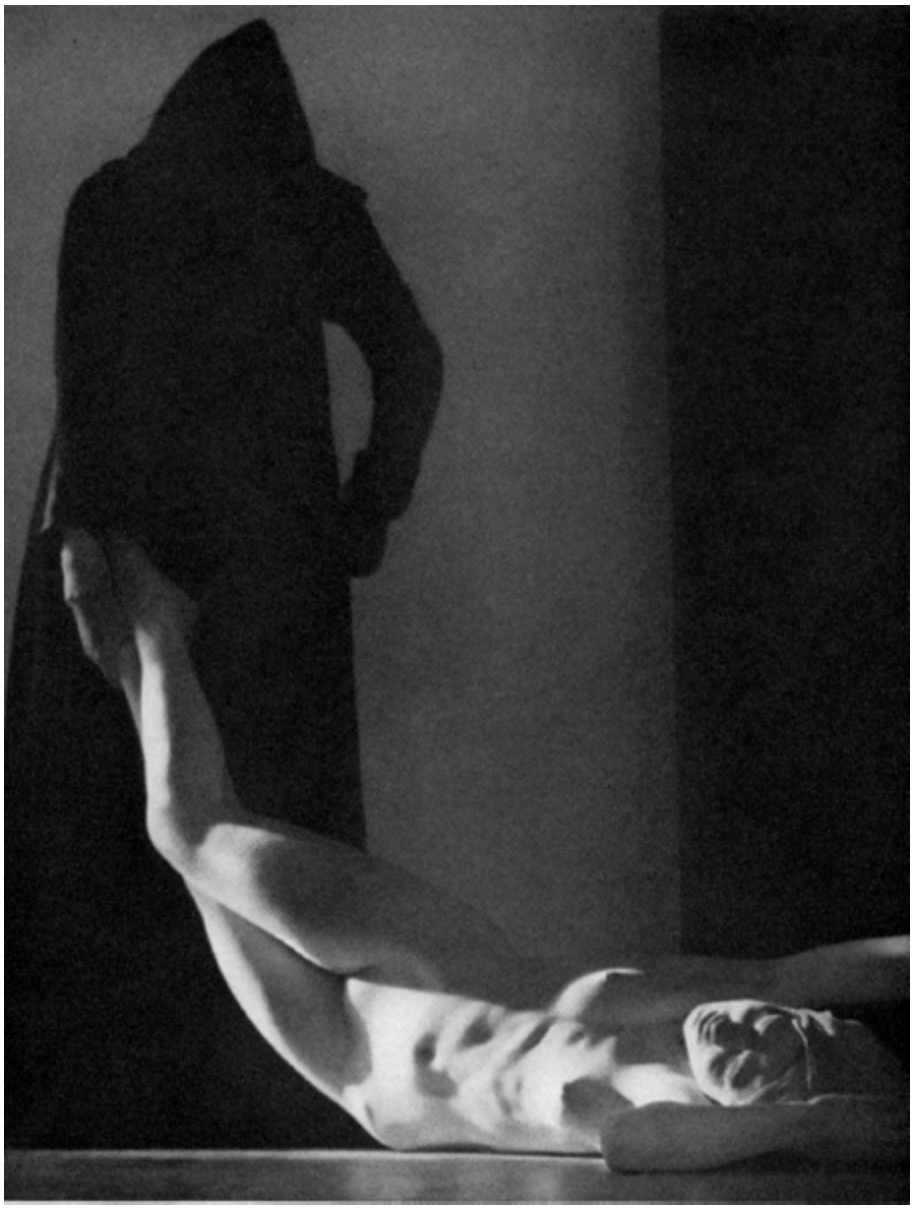
There is a TACTILE QUALITY of extreme softness of hair and flesh. This serves as a CONFIRMING element to the quiet, contemplative expression.

DEATH OF HYPATIA

The DIAGONAL of the Impact is made increasingly arresting by the violence of the contrast.

The shocking nature of this contrast is in keeping with the melodramatic turn taken here by the WONDER and SEX themes. Note that the quality of *contemplative passivity* lifts the picture above the merely episodic, and makes this moment much more menacing than it would have been had the figures been actively engaged in fighting and clawing at each other.

The motive of the crooked arm of the cowled figure is RE-ECHOED in the curve of calf, thigh, breast and arm of the woman.



THUNDER

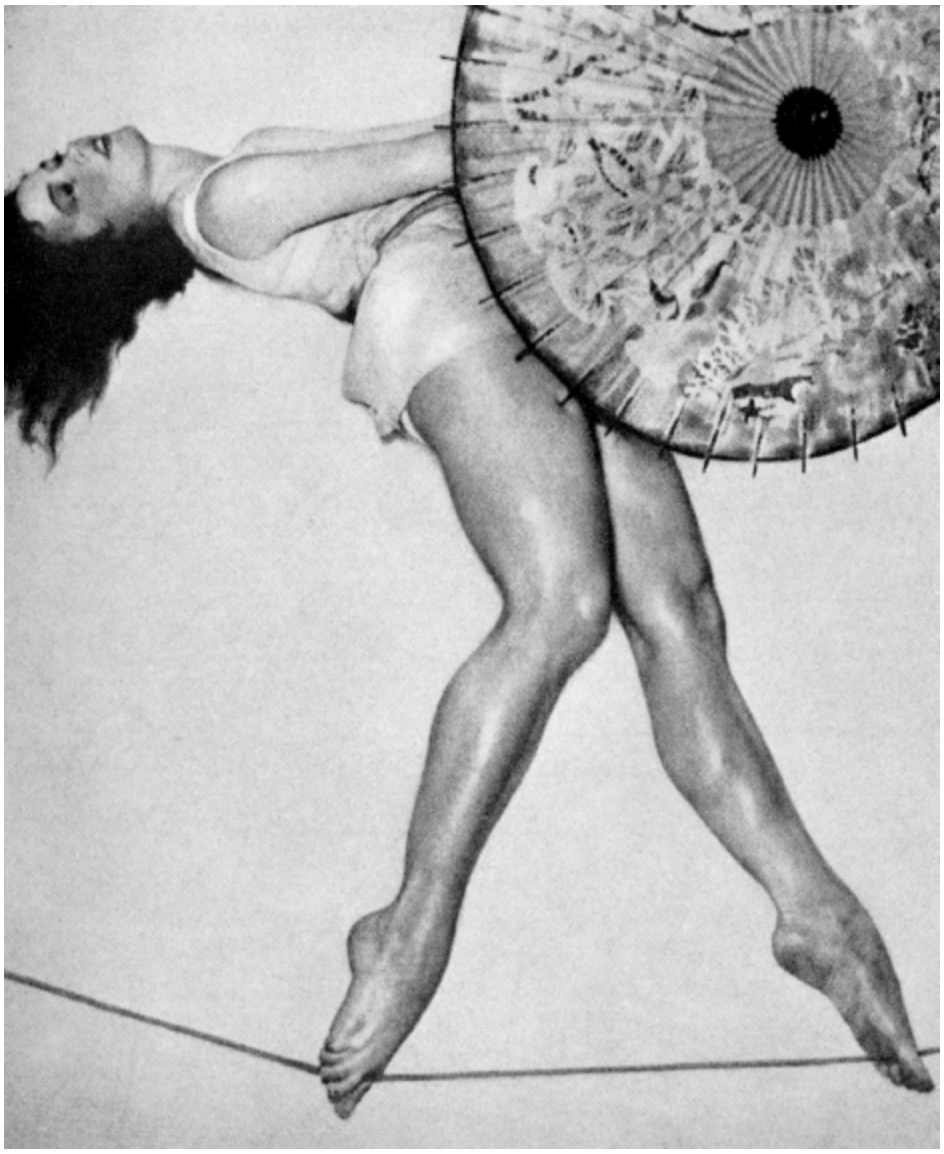
A compact DOMINANT MASS with strong notes of contrast is here the basis of the Impact. The theme of WONDER is carried out in the expression of the face and in the swirling cloud masses.

These clouds CONFIRM the energy expressed by the hair. The same theme is expressed in the sweeping curve of the neckline. Note the element of HINDRANCE in the detail of drapery on the shoulder. The eye tarries over this for a moment and is then carried swiftly down the descending curve, up into the face and thence into the surrounding sky.

ROPE DANCER

Here is an Impact based on a DIAGONAL supported by various TRIANGLES. The subject theme is SEX, to which is added a suggestion of the WONDER theme (the eternal mystery and fascination of the circus). The theme is freed of realistic implications by being treated solely for its decorative values.

The converging lines of the legs MOVE the eye swiftly into the picture. After meeting with and overcoming numerous HINDRANCES, the eye is swung back into the picture space by the black mass of hair. Note the tiny accent of TACTILE QUALITY which is provided by the little depression in the flesh of the leg where the rib of the parasol touches it.



PREPARATION FOR THE SABBOT

Here is Impact based on DOMINANT MASS, made explosive and startling by violent contrast—a gleaming white figure set against a gloomy background, like a flame flaring in the darkness. There are also elements of the S-CURVE. SEX and WONDER both contribute to the subject interest.

The looker is given a sense of the young witch's impending flight by repeated thrusts along the diagonal running from lower left to upper right. This direction is emphasized by the witch's lifted leg, by the broomstick, by the arm of the old beldame and by the right arm of the witch.

THE VAMPIRE

The impact is here created by the DIAGONAL which is made additionally arresting by the strong *contrast*. This is an example of the WONDER theme —the strange and terrible legend of the Undead.

Note how the wedge shape of the stake is ECHOED in the triangular folds of the grave clothes that swathe the body. There is a violent TACTILE QUALITY in the penetration of the stake into the body. This is also felt, in a lesser degree, in the contrast between the smooth flesh of the shoulder and the rough stone.

FLEMISH MAID

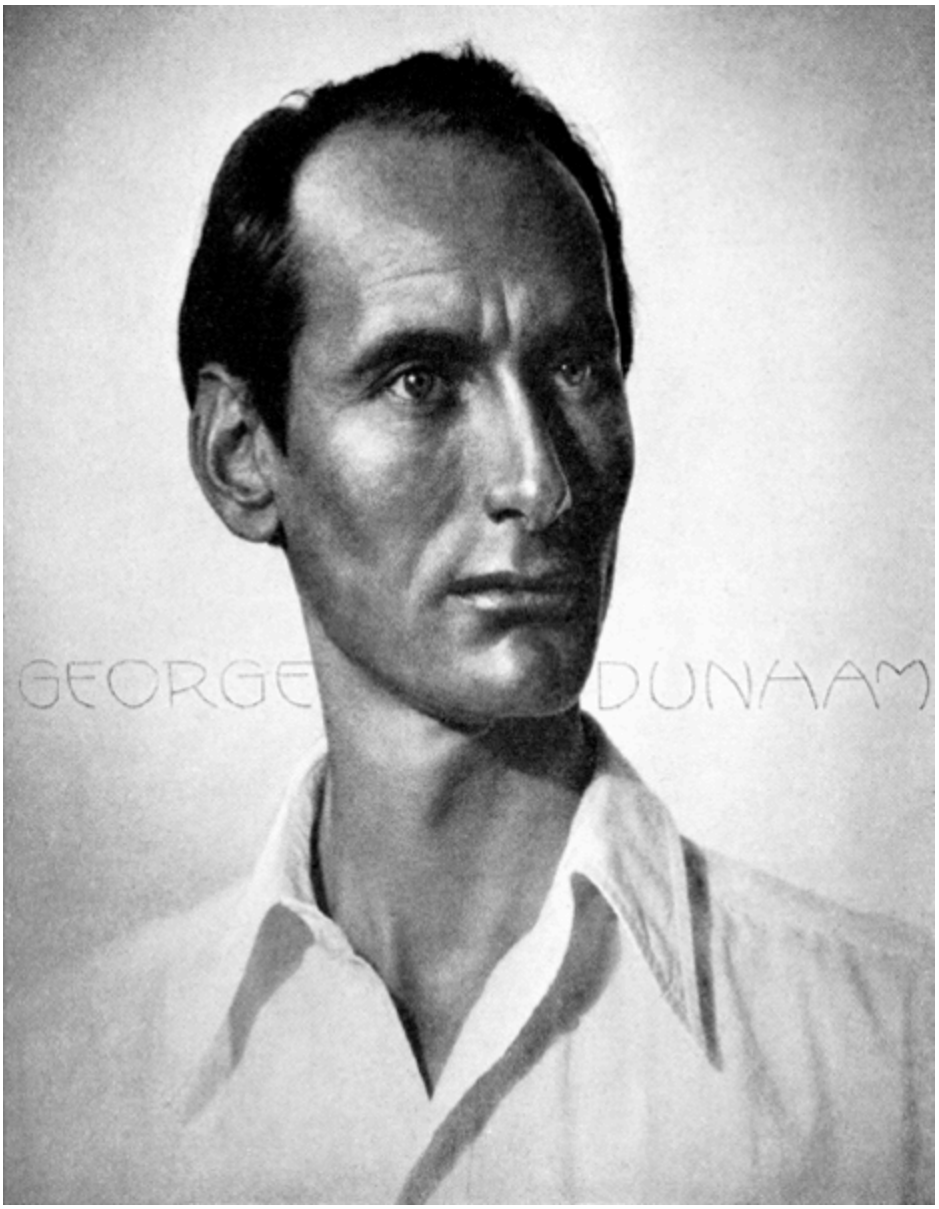
DOMINANT MASS with strong contrast provides the Impact. The subject interest is founded on SENTIMENT (the charm of familiar, domestic things).

MOVEMENT around the involved contour enclosed by the arms, shoulders and headdress holds the eye within the picture. Owing to the placid, familiar implications of the theme, the movement is made slow and deliberate with many HINDRANCES and tarrying places introduced by complex bits of detail and contour.

PORTRAIT OF AN AMERICAN

Here is a compact DOMINANT MASS with strong elements of contrast. The elongation serves to wipe out distracting realistic details and to make this a generalized, universal portrait rather than a personalized one. The decisiveness and directness of this portrait are due to the insistent vertical elements.

Ethnological note: The extreme and effective length of this head was attained by emphasizing, through projection printing, characteristics already inherent in the model.


GEORGE
DUNAAM

STAMBOUL

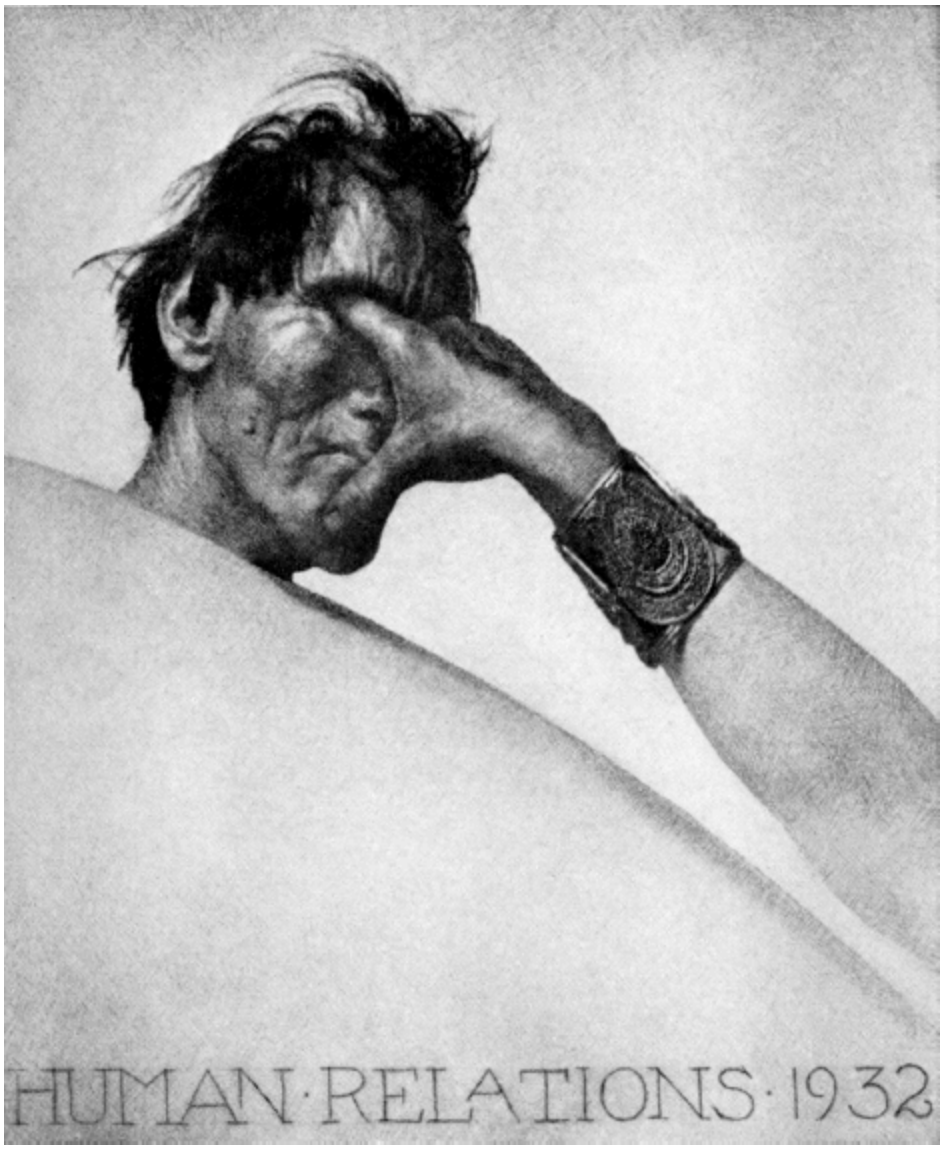
Compact DOMINANT MASS is evident here, together with a hint of the S-CURVE. SEX is the obvious source of subject interest, but there is also something of the WONDER theme—the romance of far countries.

The outer contour is smooth, but ample HINDRANCES are provided in the complexity of detail at shoulder and girdle. Note how the three fingers of the right hand ECHO the three daggers.

HUMAN RELATIONS

Impact is based on DOMINANT MASS supported by a powerful DIAGONAL.

The disordered hair is really a sort of CONFIRMING FORM which develops, in its own medium, the savagery of the action. Cover the hair with your finger, and imagine how greatly the picture would lose if the hair were slicked down smoothly. The bracelet on the arm, by introducing a note of HINDRANCE, adds strength to the gesture. Note how it is weakened when this element is covered up.


HUMAN·RELATIONS·1932

FAGIN

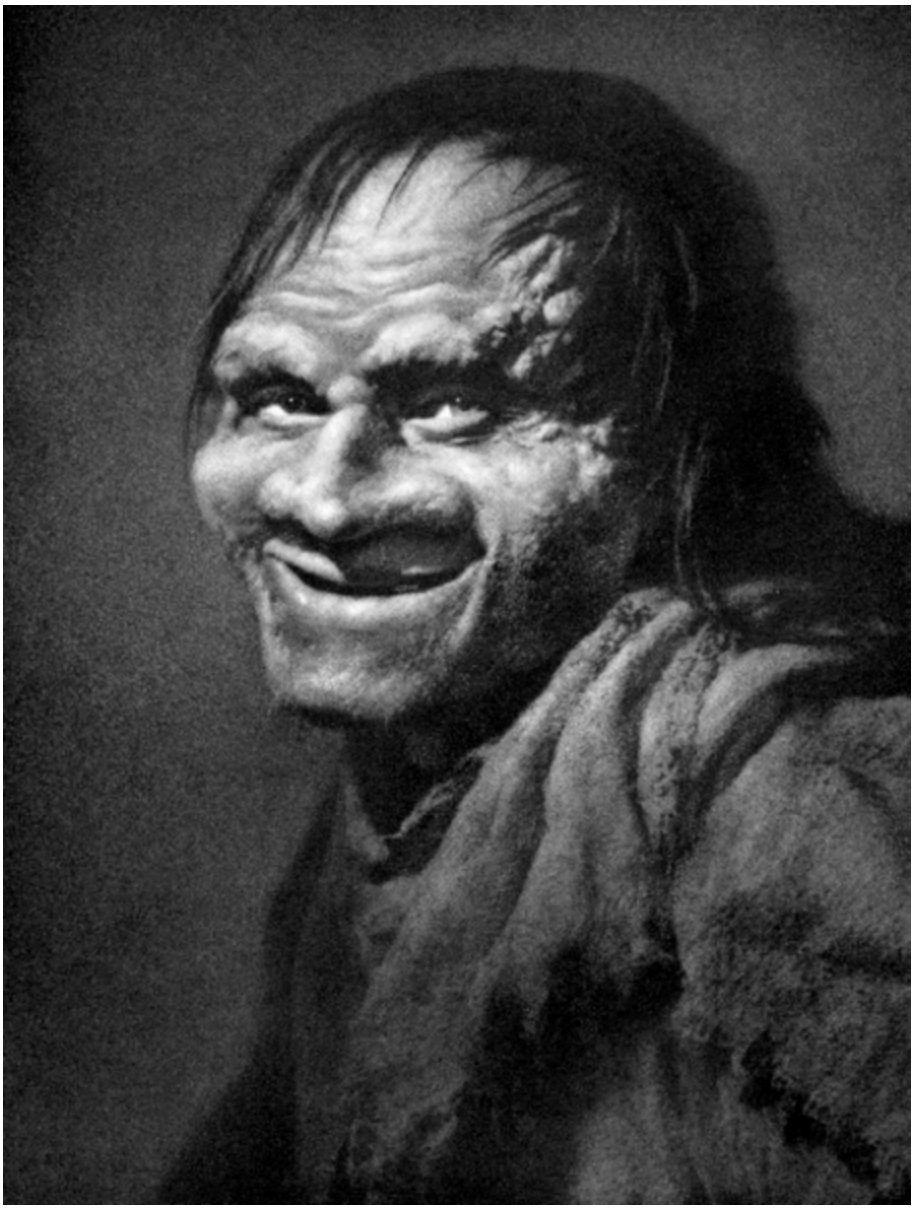
The DOMINANT MASS of the Impact is strengthened by numerous TRIANGLES. The triangles serve to strengthen the glint of *menace* contained in the eyes.

Here is a crafty, secretive character. So there are no passages of easy and free MOVEMENT. Instead, the movement is cramped by continual HINDRANCES that twist and turn the eye through bits of involved detail. Note the ECHOING of the motive in the twisted smile—in the lock of hair by the right eye, and in the pattern of the headdress.

BELPHEGOR

The DOMINANT MASS of the Impact is made more forceful and startling by the strong contrast. Here is a WONDER theme—the dark fascination of the subhuman.

The contour is very simple, but ample HINDRANCES are afforded by the lumpy modeling and by the TACTILE QUALITIES. These tactile suggestions are all of a harsh sort and help to build the bestiality of the theme, e.g., the stiff, bristly hair and the bulbous fungoid mass on the temple. Note the REPETITION of a bulging, crescent-shaped motive—the brows, the wings of the nose, the cheekbones and skin.



JOHAN THE MAD

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS which gains in force by its *size* and extreme *cohesiveness.*

This picture (as we have already seen in Chapter Six) offers a particularly good instance of the use of CONFORMING FORMS. The madness and agony that appears in the staring eyes and the twisted mouth is CONFIRMED in another medium in the tightly twisted headdress. The theme of madness is further ECHOED and developed (1) in the diagonal that hacks off the bottom of the picture, and (2) in the erratic arrangement of the title.

JOHAN
the Mad

FROU FROU

DOMINANT MASS is here supported by a DIAGONAL. The theme is frankly SEX, but it is presented lightly and delicately.

The contrasting elements of lace increase the TACTILE QUALITIES of the adjoining area of flesh. Note how the fussy little bow serves as a CONFIRMING FORM to the piquant expression. The expression loses some of its sparkle when the bow is covered up.

CIRCE

Here we have a simple pyramidal DOMINANT MASS with strong notes of contrast.

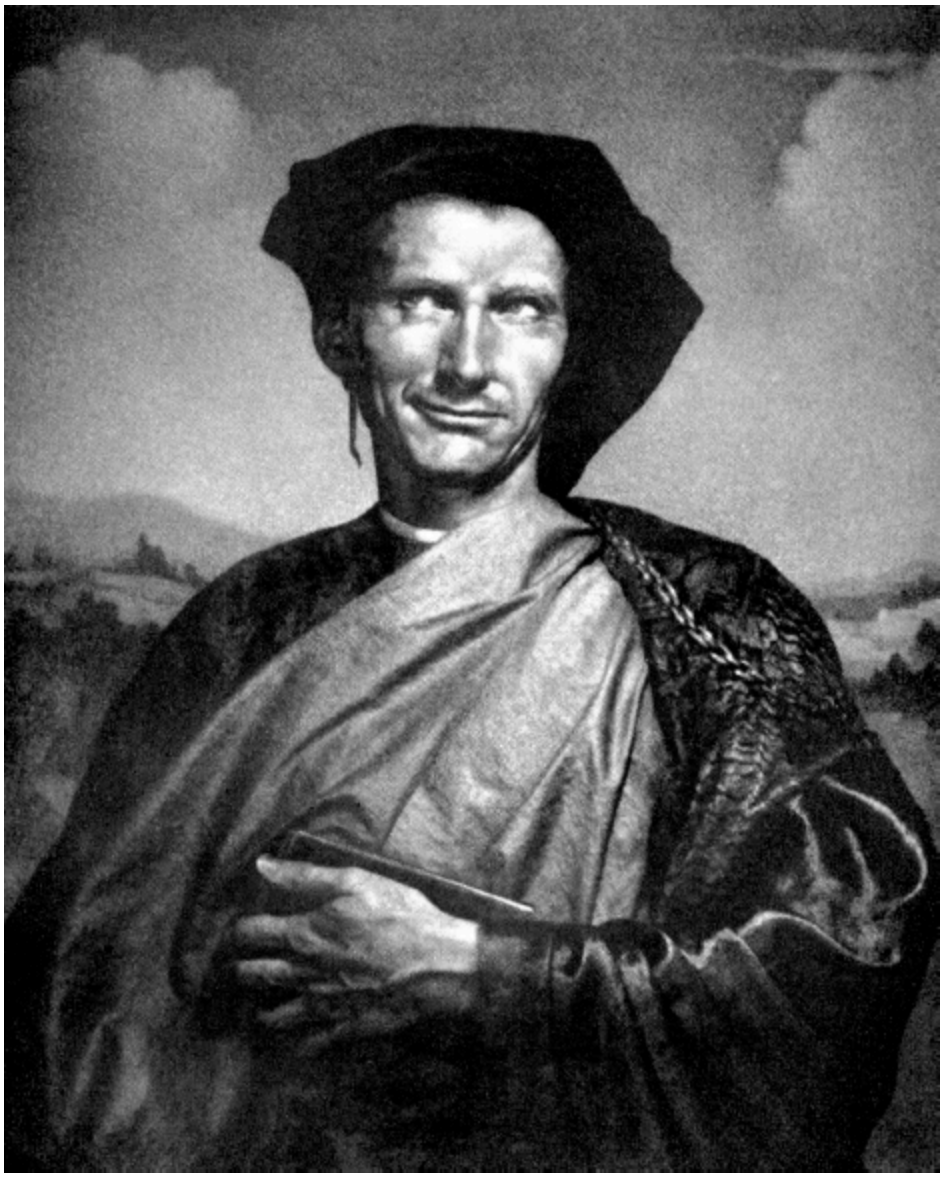
Two themes contribute to the subject matter: SEX and WONDER. Note how an increased impression of impersonality and universality is gained by the use of elongation.

There is a motive of a curiously pointed curve which is repeatedly ECHOED throughout the picture. It appears in the line of the jaw, in the curve of the breasts, in the lift of the eyebrows, in the tiara, in the hairline and in the contour of the top of the head. The prevalence of this elusive ovoid motive emphasizes the suggestion of intangibility and unreality.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

DOMINANT MASS is here the basis of the Impact. There is definitely a suggestion of something crouching and beastlike in the hint of pointed *ears* on either side of the headdress. There is also an implication of the S-CURVE in the line of the headdress and the sweep of the sleeve.

The whole expressiveness of the picture lies in the suggestion of evasiveness and craftiness in the sidelong glance and the one-sided smile. The twist of this smile is CONFIRMED in the dangling ribbon and RE-ECHOED in the cloud form in the upper corner. The same sardonic motive smirks at you repeatedly in the curve of the collar, in the veins of the hand, and in the twisted folds of the sleeve.



DORIS

DOMINANT MASS, given stability by the spreading base, and compactness by joining the dark of the hair to the dark of the dress.

The theme is SENTIMENT, which is given an added piquancy of SEX by the challenging glance.

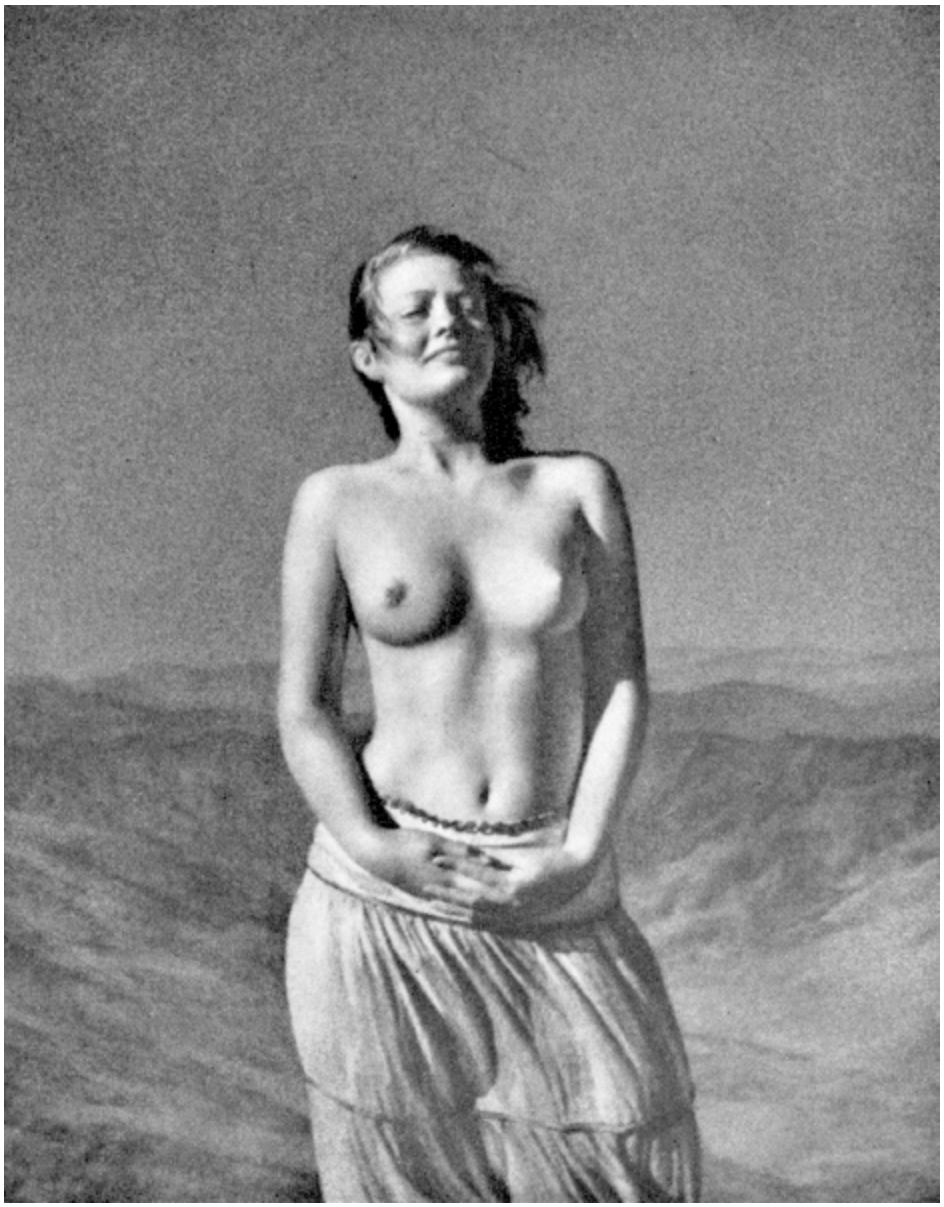
The flower is in effect a CONFIRMING FORM, which emphasizes the delicacy of the subject material. The flower also RE-ECHOES the lacy bits of detail at wrist and throat.

DORIS
1928

THE NEW RACE

DOMINANT MASS is noted here, the strength of which is increased by the darkness of the sky and landscape background.

SEX is the theme, touched with WONDER at the mystery of fecundity. Resistance to the eye's movement through the picture is afforded by the roughly hewn angles. Note the almost geometrical regularity of the area enclosed by the arms, hands and shoulders. This angular quality, although unfeminine, increases the impression of massive and primitive strength. The heavy breasts find CONFIRMING FORMS in the rolling hills beyond. The folds of the dress are ECHOED in the ravines and defiles in the background, the same motive being again repeated in the sweeping curves of the hair.



PIETY

The Impact is created in this picture by the powerful DIAGONAL.

Hands are often more truly revealing of character and emotion than are faces. Hands, therefore, may on occasion be legitimate objects of emotional interest. The interest here is clearly based on SENTIMENT.

Because of their own complexity of structure, the hands are here presented without extraneous detail. The moments of RESISTANCE are provided by the hands themselves—the slight projection of the thumbs, the rippling contour past the tips of the fingers, the bit of literal skin texture near the wrist. Note that the moments of resistance are slight and in no way contradict the quiet implications of the theme of Piety.

L’AMOUR

A strongly contrasted DOMINANT MASS is the basis of the Impact. To this is added a powerful suggestion of the DIAGONAL.

SEX is of course the subject interest, which is here given additional morbid pungency by the sadistic implications of the theme.

The MOVEMENT is rough and jagged, but is held closely within the picture. TACTILE QUALITIES are very evident here, and are derived from the contrast between the shaggy coat of the beast and the smooth skin of the girl.

Zoological note: This is not a montage or combination print. The two figures were actually photographed together. The only added elements are the clouds, which were put in by Bromoil.

BETTY

The Impact here is based on DOMINANT MASS, which is made more compact and cohesive by the device of raising the shoulder. The subject interest grows out of SEX shading into SENTIMENT.

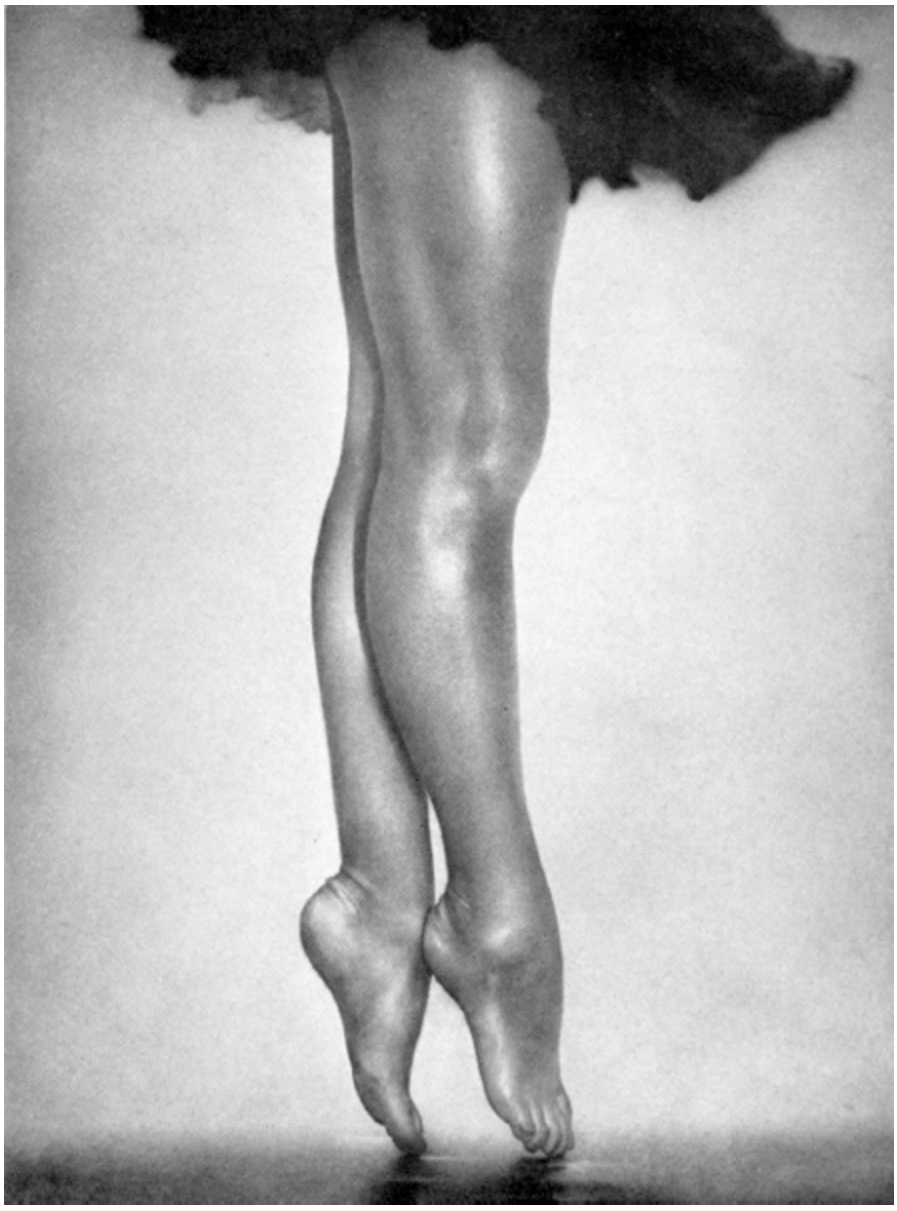
The otherwise slick contour provides its element of RESISTANCE and pleasant hesitation in the detail and complexity of the comb. Note how the shape of the comb CONFIRMS the roundness of shoulder. Note also that the detail of the comb is delicately RE-ECHOED in the tiny curls on either side of the head.

·BETTY·

PAS DE BALLET

DOMINANT MASS is here made startling and poster-like by *contrast* and *isolation*. The subject is given a universal implication by the complete elimination of all non-essentials and by the absence of realistic muscular strain.

The eye MOVES up the rhythmic contour of the legs, is caught, held and turned back into the picture by the filmy skirt. The skirt also serves to introduce a TACTILE element—emphasizing, by contrast, the gleaming smoothness of the flesh.

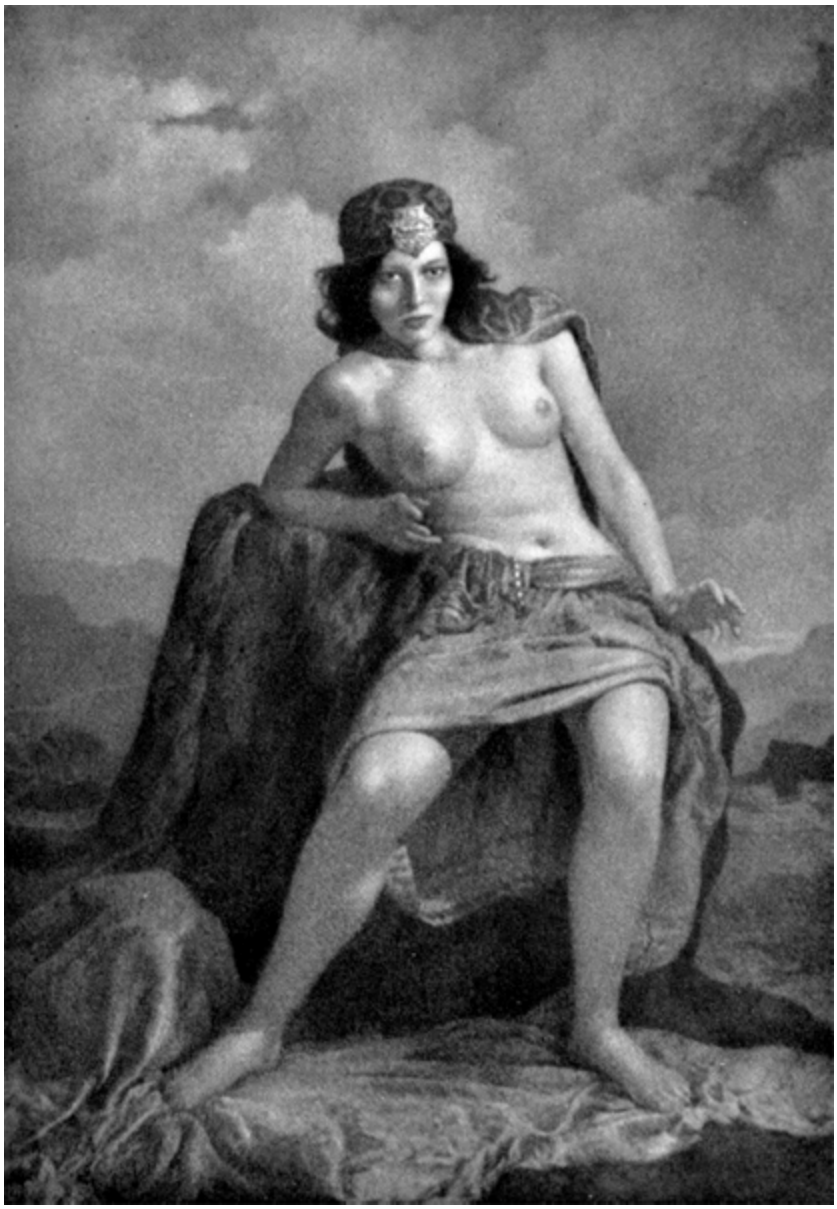


À LA GARE

This is DOMINANT MASS of the simplest pyramidal type. The subject interest, of course, is direct and outright SENTIMENT. The harsh DIAGONAL acts as an effective foil to the softness of the face. The tightly drawn shawl and headdress, by their meagerness, serve as CONFIRMING FORMS that emphasize the pathos of the expression. The straight pyramidal contour would prove too dull and uneventful to sustain the eye's interest, so HINDRANCES are provided in the rather full rendition of the pattern and folds of the shawl.

THE PRIESTESS

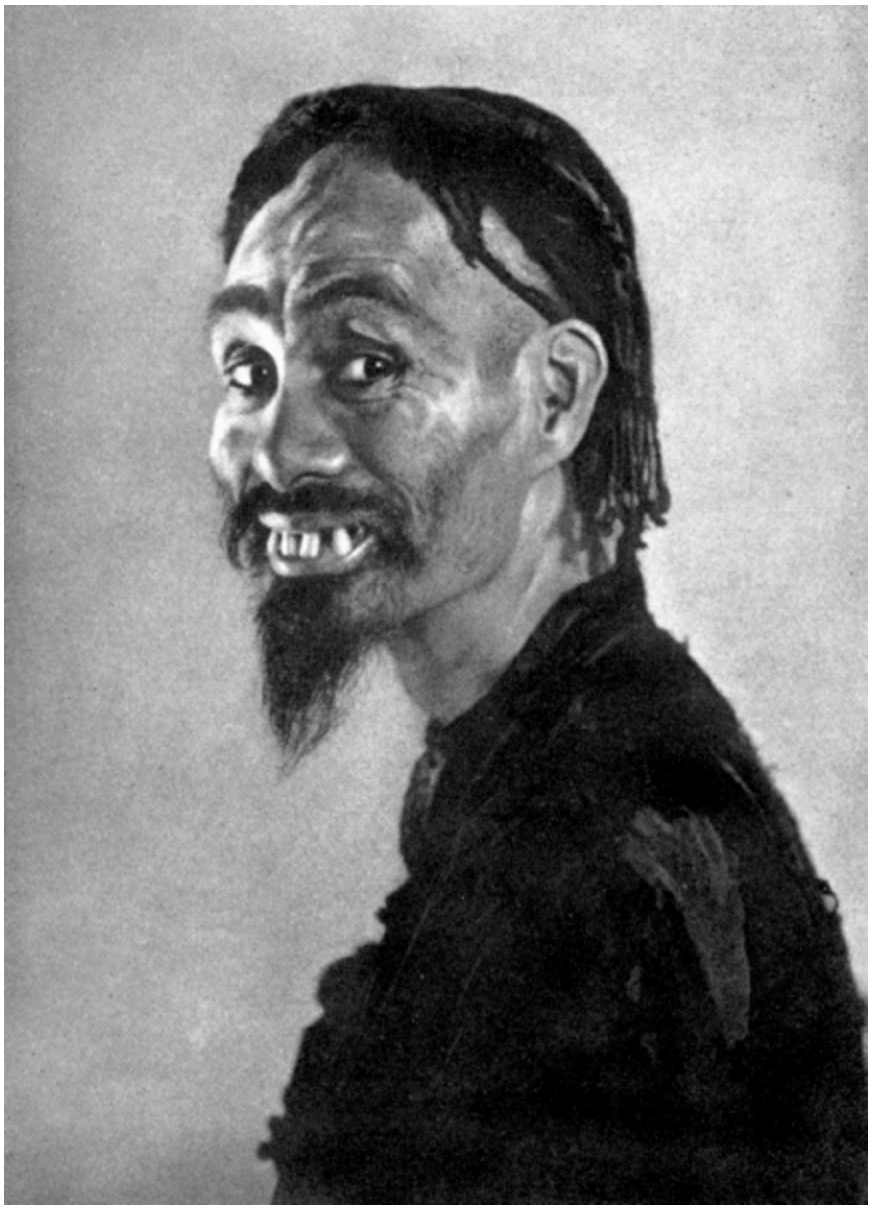
Here is a firmly planted DOMINANT MASS combined with the S-CURVE. Despite the use of the nude, the theme (as I have previously pointed out) is that of WONDER—the cruel, absolute, inscrutable mystery of the *Law*. The implications of the theme are borne out by the ponderous pyramidal form of the Impact.



THE EPICURE

Here is DOMINANT MASS with a hint of the DIAGONAL.

The zestful grin sparkles throughout the picture in individual separated highlight accents. The same thought is developed in the whimsical contour of the front of the garment.



GIVE US THIS DAY

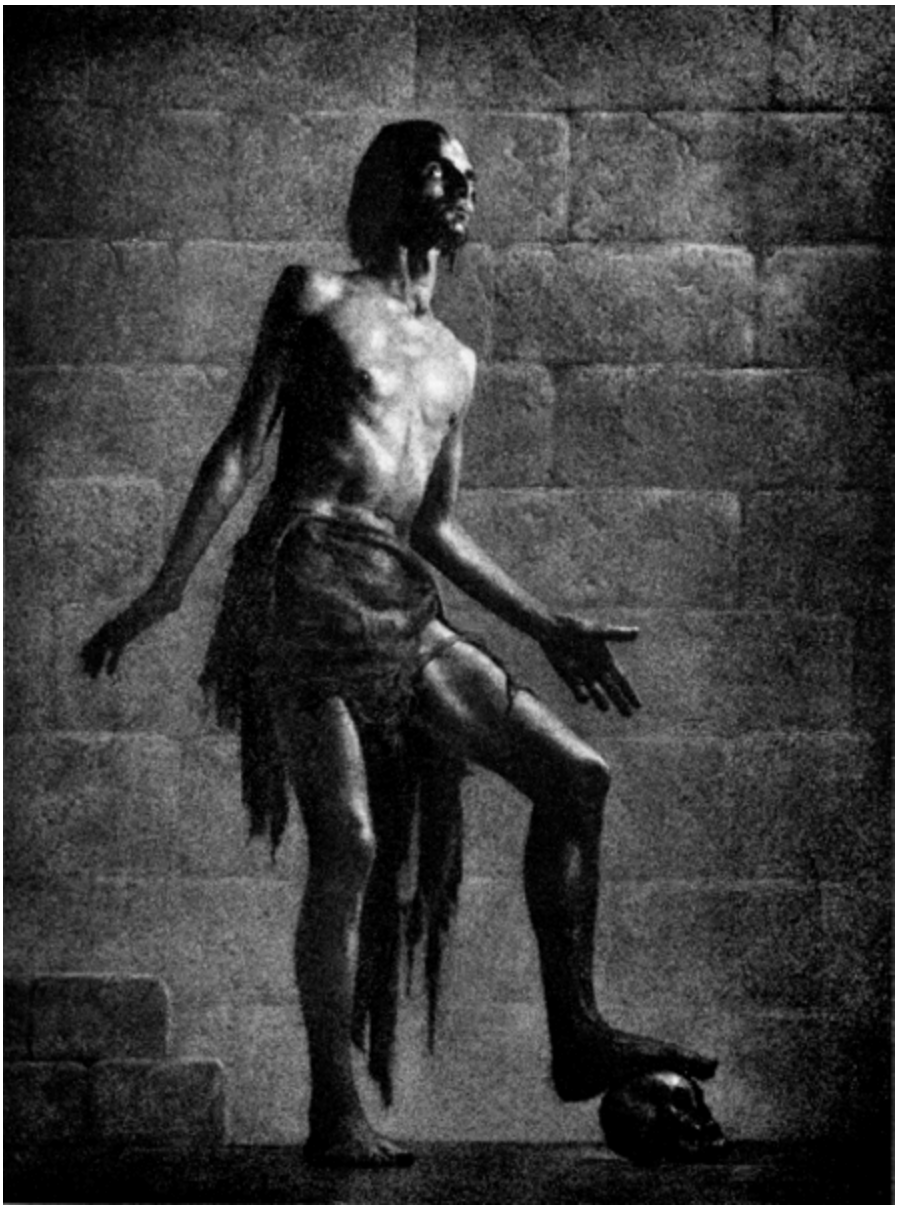
Three figures are here joined into a single, pyramidally shaped DOMINANT MASS. TRIANGLES also contribute to the Impact.

SENTIMENT (the “humble life” theme) touched with WONDER is the basis of the subject interest.

The form of the oar blade is ECHOED in the shape of the man’s collar. Note the rhythmic conformity of the number of physical elements in the picture: *three* figures, *three* apples; *one* oar, *one* jug.

LAZARUS

We have here DOMINANT MASS and the S-CURVE made emphatic by contrast. This theme, of course, is WONDER—the mystery of death and man's victory over it. It is a subject universal in import, and is presented with as little in the way of physical appurtenances as possible. Two elements alone carry the theme—the mortal symbol of the skull and Lazarus' gesture toward the light.



DESERT-BORN

Here is DOMINANT MASS of a somewhat pyramidal character. The staff brings in suggestions of the S-CURVE. The subject interest is based on SENTIMENT—the simple life theme—primitive existence close to the soil.

The primitive thought is CONFIRMED in the broad-based, firmly planted figure and in the harsh intersection of lights and shadows. The cloud mass is ECHOED in size and shape by the shadow underneath the figure.

THE POSSESSED

This picture offers a particularly good study in the use of confirming forms and echoes.

The WONDER theme of the terror that howls in barren places is expressed in the wind that sweeps through this picture. Before it everything writhes and dissolves; Nature disintegrates into nightmare.

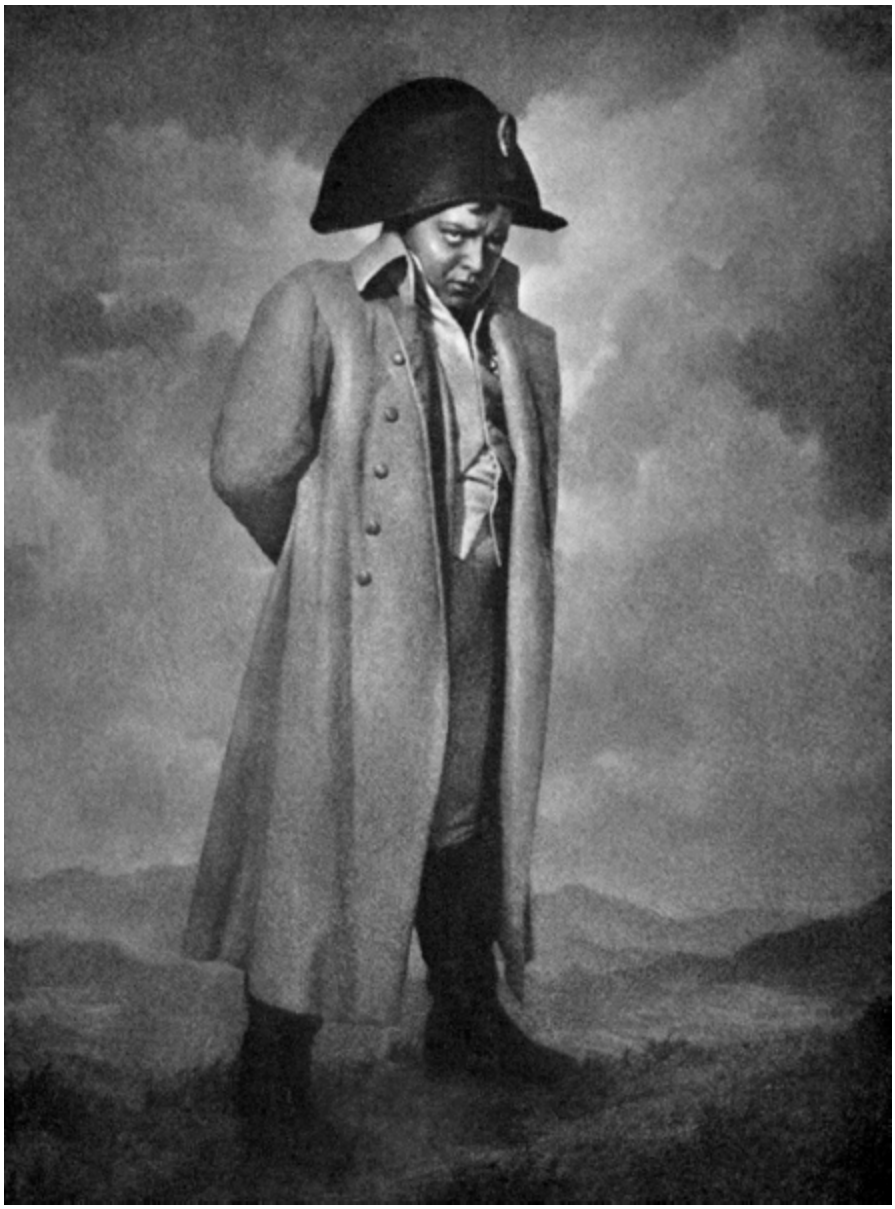
Note the repetition of the twisted spikey theme—the tree forms on the distant hill, the tufts of hair, the clawlike fingers, the tattered garment. We feel the force of the wind as actual resistance to the movement of the eye through this picture. The eye tries to move along the contour of the arm, but is repeatedly caught and carried over to the left of the picture.

NAPOLEON

Towering DOMINANT MASS, broad-based and stable, is made more cohesive and unified by the use of the long coat.

The rolling masses of clouds serve as CONFIRMING FORMS to the lowered brow.

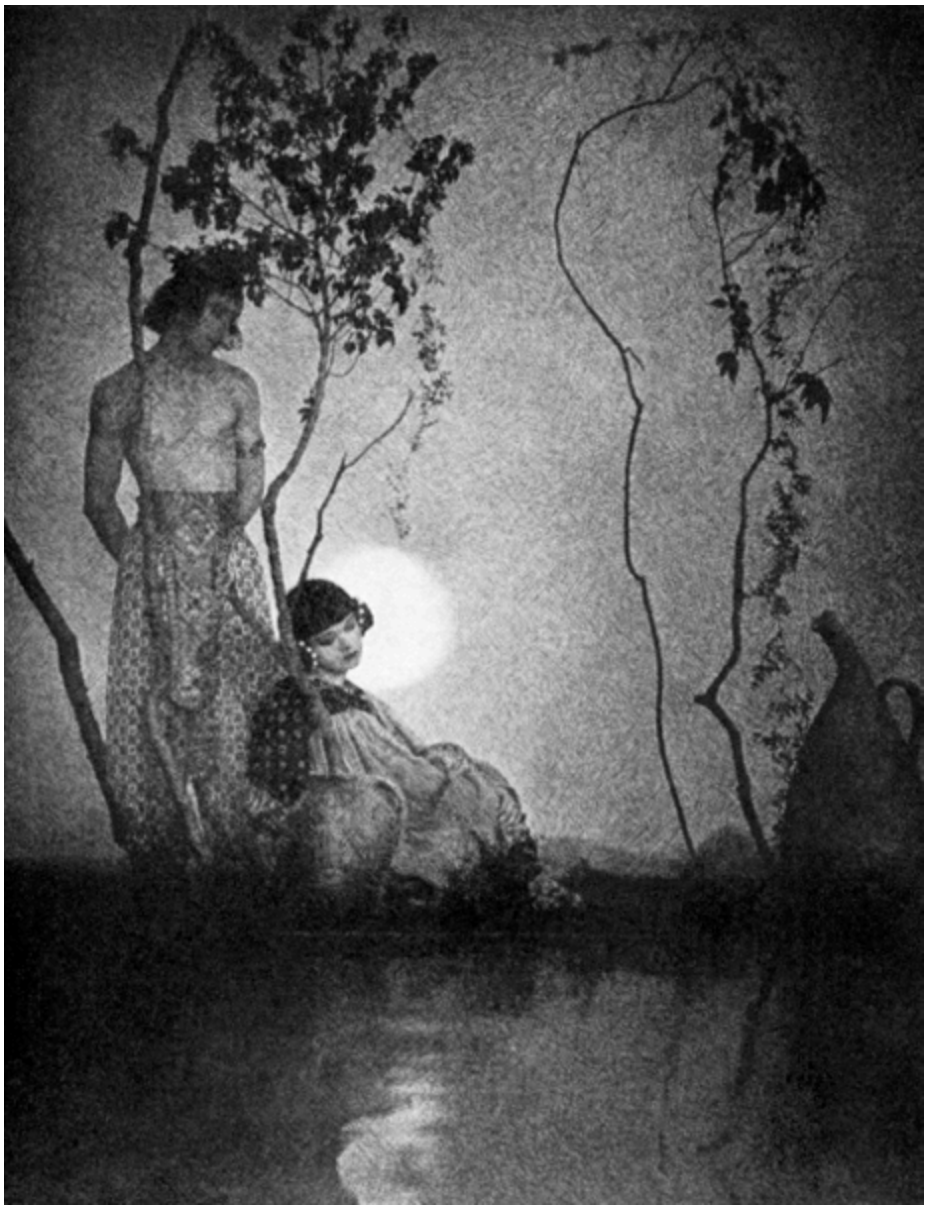
Personality note: The Little Corporal was interpreted for this picture by the eminent character actor Peter Lorre.

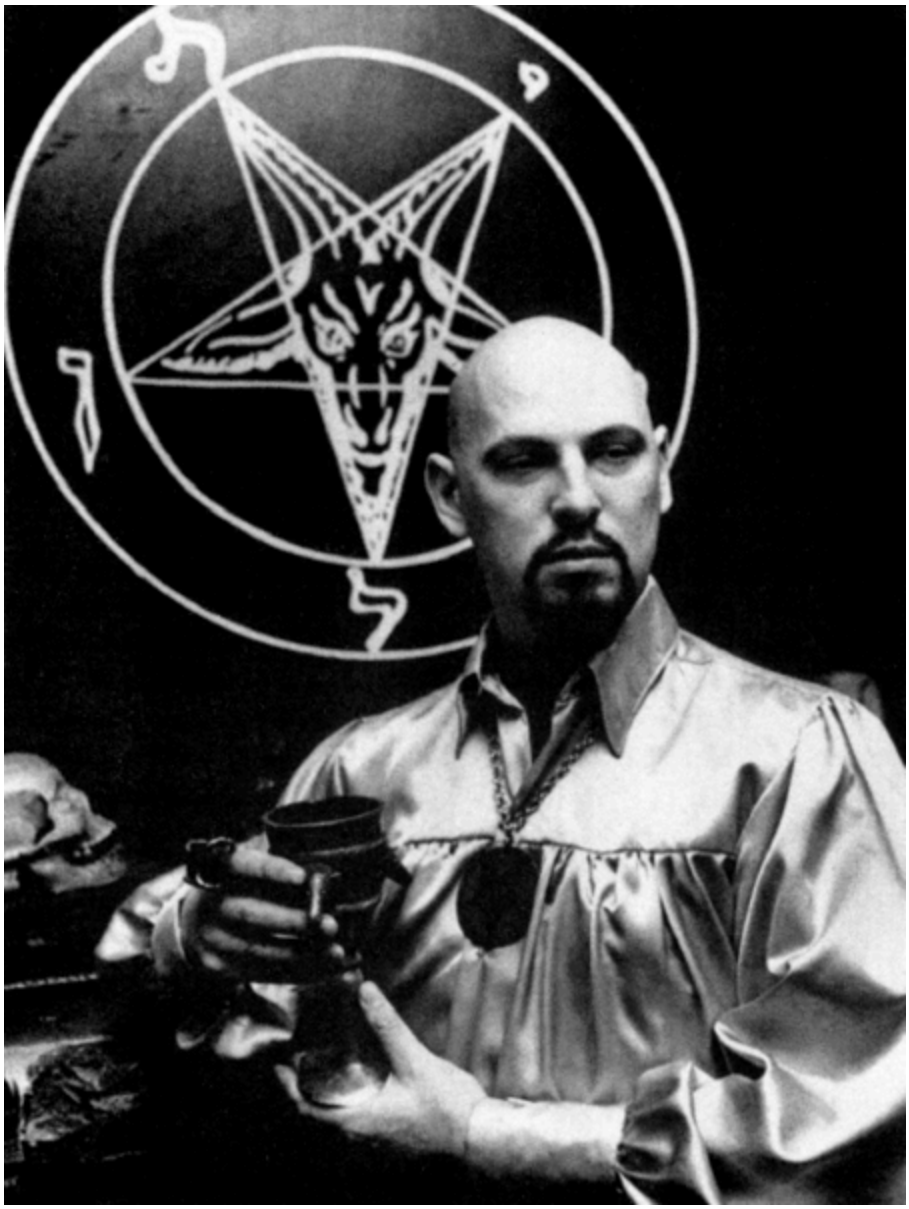


TRANQUILITY

Here is a DIAGONAL with a single strong note of *contrast*. The subject theme is obviously SENTIMENT.

Note the many CONFIRMING FORMS of the atmosphere of quiet and nocturnal reverie. All shapes seem affected by the lassitude and languor of the summer night. The moon hangs low, as if unable to struggle higher in the heavens. The two figures bend their heads dreamily, the branches bend low, even the neck of the jug bends in response.





Anton Szandor LaVey in the early years of the Church of Satan

MICHAEL MOYNIHAN

INFERNAL IMPACT:

THE COMMAND TO LOOK AS A FORMULA FOR SATANIC SUCCESS

"You must put forth your own initiative in applying the formula."
—WILLIAM MORTENSEN

THE RISE OF SATANISM in twentieth-century popular culture is largely due to Anton Szandor LaVey (1930–1997), who proclaimed the first public Church of Satan on April 30th, 1966. The date coincided with the old European celebration of Walpurgis Night, which despite its saintly Christian namesake has carried dark connotations since the Middle Ages. On Walpurgis Night, flocks of witches are said to transport themselves via supernatural means to their annual sabbath—an orgiastic feast on a remote mountaintop, presided over by Satan himself.

For years LaVey had cultivated a colorful reputation as an eccentric in his hometown of San Francisco, but after he ritually shaved his head on that Walpurgis Night in 1966, the world began to take notice. The exploits of this modern Mephistopheles and his Satanic church were soon being broadcast through countless articles in the American and international media. Nearly a half-century later, the Church of Satan remains a visible presence in the occult subculture as well as wielding a broader influence, especially in the world of the arts. This is fitting as LaVey was at heart an

artistic personality himself—by turns a painter, photographer, writer, and musician.

In the Church's early years LaVey set down the basics of Satanic theory and practice in *The Satanic Bible*, first published in 1969 and in print ever since. This was followed in 1971 by a "how-to" handbook for witches (LaVey's term for female Satanists) called *The Compleat Witch, or What to Do When Virtue Fails* (later reissued as *The Satanic Witch*). In 1972 LaVey released *The Satanic Rituals*, a compendium of Satanic ceremonies that included the liturgy for a Black Mass. Beyond these core titles, LaVey also produced a considerable number of shorter texts, essays, and declarations over the three decades between 1966 and his death in 1997. These writings often appeared in the Church of Satan's internal newsletter, *The Cloven Hoof*, and were subsequently collected in two commercially published anthologies, *The Devil's Notebook* (1992) and *Satan Speaks!* (1998).[1]

In developing his own brand of Satanism, LaVey drew from an eclectic range of sources. These included philosophers (Friedrich Nietzsche, Ragnar Redbeard, Herbert Spencer, Ayn Rand) and scientists (Robert Ardrey, Orrin Klapp, Wilhelm Reich), but also authors of fiction (William Lindsay Gresham, H.P. Lovecraft, Frank Belknap Long, Robert Chambers) and various branches of the arts (Romanticism, French Decadence, film noir, circus culture). In addition to these relatively prominent sources, LaVey drew inspiration from a multitude of more obscure personalities. One of the most important of the lesser-known influences was the photographer William Mortensen, whose work made a striking impact on LaVey. Although Mortensen would have likely been shocked by this unexpected development (had he lived to see it), his ideas nevertheless served as a fundamental reference point for Anton LaVey's theories of Satanic magic, ritual, and aesthetics.

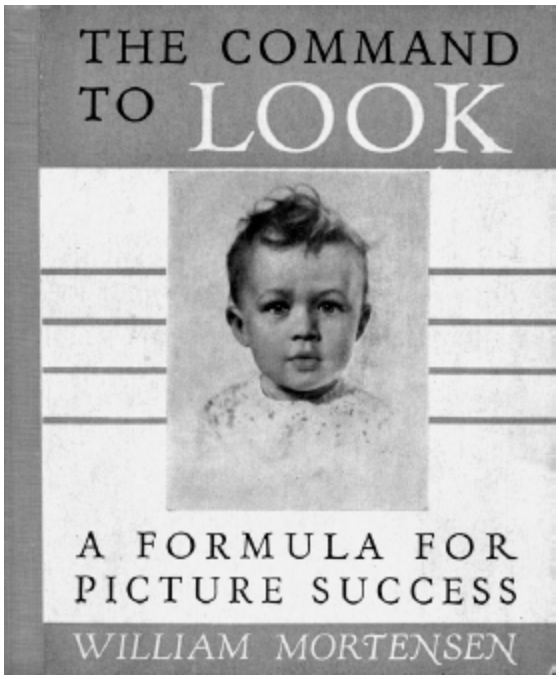
LaVey acknowledged his debt to Mortensen on various occasions, most prominently in the first edition of *The Satanic Bible*. This featured a dedication page containing nineteen names, together with a short descriptive phrase for each (the list does not appear in later editions of the book). Occultists, scientists, thinkers, artists, explorers, and entertainers are included—some of them are famous, but others are utterly obscure. The eighth dedicatee certainly falls into the latter category: "William Mortensen,

who looked . . . and saw." This cryptic phrase alludes to the fact that Mortensen's primary influence on LaVey was through his book *The Command to Look.*

As a recent study of LaVey and the Church of Satan notes, "The psycho-optical theories contained in [*The Command to Look*] greatly influenced LaVey's approach to art and to images and the way they can influence the human mind. It must be considered a keystone of LaVeyan Satanism."[2] This is confirmed and expanded upon by Blanche Barton, who was LaVey's partner, confidante, and biographer, as well as the High Priestess for the Church in the last dozen years of LaVey's life. Barton recalls that

> Mortensen's perspective touched Anton in so many ways, influencing his own art, and much of his ideas on beauty, compulsion, weird architecture, and elements of *The Compleat Witch*. And just general creative thinking, breaking out of the boundaries of your art. Also he took Mortensen very much to heart when it came to forcing people to focus where you want them to focus, like a good stage magician.[3]

In a chapter titled "Angles of Madness" in her biography of LaVey, *The Secret Life of a Satanist*, Barton reports how the future Black Pope discovered Mortensen's *The Command to Look* as a teenager in the 1940s. He recognized its importance at once:



The original cover of *The Command to Look*

> Ostensibly a guide to picture-taking, the small book forever changed the way LaVey perceived the world around him. In it, Mortensen explains composition and what makes a compelling photo or scene. He puts forth certain visual laws which LaVey immediately applied to areas beyond photography.[4]

Barton then goes on to discuss the book's influence on a number of LaVey's ideas and interests that would play a role in the developing ideology of the Church of Satan. These include the occult effects of certain geometric configurations, the necessity of archetypal themes, and the deliberate use of "timeless composition."[5] In short, LaVey learned from Mortensen the hidden dynamics of visual manipulation, which can be a tool for positive or negative outcomes. Whereas Mortensen had naturally limited his formulas to the static and flat two-dimensional surfaces of artwork and photography, LaVey took things in a dramatic new direction. He applied Mortensen's theories to the multidimensional and richly sensorial world of animate human beings.

Why did William Mortensen's little book strike such a resonant chord with Anton LaVey? The spiral wire-binding and gray tones of the original

cover seem better suited to an industrial machine-operating manual, and further incongruities arise with the book's bold, authoritative title and the image of a tousled, blue-eyed baby in pajamas that Mortensen chose for the cover. This is sharply contrasted by the visions to be found within, which range from sensual pin-ups to macabre scenes of bondage, domination, and witchcraft. The book's stylized and self-assured prose is equally arresting. Mortensen's forceful words emphasize the importance of showmanship and appearances, but especially the necessity of commanding a viewer's gaze at an unconscious and even primal level, which the book claims to provide a simple formula for achieving. To a man such as LaVey—who was fascinated by the history of diabolism, but was disappointed by the arcane and convoluted nature of ceremonial magic—*The Command to Look* was a revelation. Here was a manual of magical theory that was itself occult, in the sense of being "hidden in plain sight," concealed between the covers of a seemingly innocuous handbook for amateur photographers. In the years that followed his discovery of *The Command to Look*, LaVey picked up every Mortensen book he could get his hands on, and also visited exhibitions of Mortensen's work.[6]

Many of Mortensen's ideas resonated with the concepts that LaVey was developing in Satanism. These include a central recognition of fear and the grotesque; the influence of certain spatial elements on the mind; and, in a greater sense, the recognition and practical application of aesthetics. And then there is the conception of the artist as magician, and vice versa. As LaVey would later write, "All competent magicians are masters of misdirection."[7] Mortensen's imprint can be traced throughout LaVey's writings, but it is most apparent in the theories of Satanic magic that insist upon the manipulation of sexual, psychological, and emotional forces; the necessity of polarity and opposition; and the use of drama, special effects, and stage magic in the transformation of the mundane into a new, willfully created reality. In the remainder of this essay, I will examine these resonances and connections between Mortensen and LaVey in greater and more colorful detail.

FEAR AND THE GROTESQUE

The deliberate use of fearful iconography to manipulate observers stands out as one of William Mortensen's pioneering principles that LaVey applied with consistent success. In his 1936 book *Monsters & Madonnas*, Mortensen explains how "in the pictorial art of the grotesque we are not so much concerned with stirring fear, or with representing fear, as with representing *symbols* of fear."[8] LaVey was adept at making use of such symbols on a grand scale—the very act of establishing a visible, public Church of Satan being the most obvious example! Human beings cannot help but respond to the stimuli provided by such symbolic gestures. As Mortensen relates:

> Elderly ladies . . . have often remonstrated with me for upsetting them with such horrid pictures. "The other day I saw such a sweet picture of a little boy blowing bubbles." Yet these same elderly ladies would pause, before leaving the gallery, to further upset themselves with a final glance at the most sanguinary horror that was on view.[9]

Self-portrait of William Mortensen as magician and master of misdirection

LaVey was similarly fond of skewering this sort of sanctimonious hypocrisy, and proffered his brand of Satanism as the only religion that took into account mankind's true feelings, needs, and wishes—as opposed to the prevalent but hopelessly wishful thinking that human nature can be something other than it really is.

Anton LaVey's ritual chamber at the Black House was full of curious artifacts spanning from the sexual to the religious, but many of these were also instruments of fear: brutal weapons, sinister torture instruments, and

bizarre masks. Among the decorations that hung on the wall in the chamber was a framed print of a William Mortensen photograph—presumably one that struck a particularly strong chord with LaVey.[10] It shows a naked female cowering amidst the folds of a sinister hooded presence that looms over and around her. Mortensen called this image *Obsession*, but also more bluntly retitled it *Fear*. For LaVey, these items in the ritual chamber served as powerful reminders that most religions were based upon rousing fear and thus obeisance from their adherents; by contrast, his new Satanic religion celebrated the carnal without any need to resort to terrorizing people into accepting it.

As a religion rooted in an acceptance of the reality of human behavior, Anton LaVey's Satanism positively acknowledged the importance of sexuality, eroticism, and fetishism. The same was true of even "baser" and more negative activities that he recognized as an inevitable byproduct of human nature, but did not necessarily condone (LaVey advocated a "benign police state" to keep socially destructive behaviors under control). Commenting on the topic of "Love and Hate" in *The Satanic Bible*, LaVey explains:

> Satanism has been thought of as being synonymous with cruelty and brutality. This is so only because people are afraid to face the truth —and the truth is that human beings are not all benign or all loving. Just because the Satanist admits he is contrary, because he is able to give vent to his hatred through ritualized expression, he is far *more* capable of love—the deepest kind of love. . . . Without being able to experience one of these emotions, you cannot fully experience the other.[11]

In Mortensen's writings on the grotesque in art, he similarly acknowledges the counterpoint that this offers to the sanitized pretensions of modern society:

> Everything exists through its opposite. For pictures of calm and tranquil beauty to have any meaning, even for "sweet" pictures to have any meaning, it is necessary that the grotesque and the distorted exist. Perfection of form is significant only because the

mal-forms exist also. Those who turn away from the grotesque are losing the richness and completeness of artistic experience.[12]

Central to both of these statements is the notion that polarities form a fundamental aspect of human existence, and the suppressed and shadowy corners of reality represent a reservoir of power. Savvy artists and Satanic magicians will tap into this source, for "the strange and grotesque always has a large and enthusiastic audience."[13]

MORTENSEN'S METHODS AS A FORMULA FOR SATANIC SUCCESS

LaVey's Satanism focuses on getting desired results in the material world as opposed to any mystical otherworld. He accords importance to both magic and ritual, but these are seen as having their ultimate basis in physiology and psychology. LaVey defines magic as "The change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangeable."[14] Noting that the practice of magic has been obfuscated by generations of occult authors, he laments: "The basic principles of ceremonial magic have been relegated for so long to infinitely classified bits of scholastic mysticism, that the would-be wizard becomes the *victim* of the very art of misdirection which *he, himself, should be employing*!"[15] One of LaVey's greatest sources of pragmatic insight into this crucial "art of misdirection" was William Mortensen, whose "Formula for Picture Success" he applied and adapted to the new doctrines of Satanic magic.

In the "Theory and Practice of Satanic Magic" as outlined in *The Satanic Bible*, there are two major types of Satanic sorcery: Lesser Magic, which is essentially manipulative, and Greater Magic, which is specifically ritualistic or ceremonial in form. Mortensen's influence is most thoroughly apparent in the sphere of Lesser Magic (and particularly that subcategory of it which we can designate as "Satanic Witchery"), and therefore this will receive the most scrutiny here. However, traces of Mortensen's ideas are

also evident in the practice of Greater Magic, which will be briefly discussed at the conclusion of the essay.

SATANIC LESSER MAGIC

Anton LaVey devoted much of his writing to Lesser Magic, an area in which he himself particularly excelled.[16] This type of magic is "lesser" only in its degree of complication; it is "everyday magic."[17] In LaVey's words, Lesser Magic consists of "wile and guile obtained through various devices and contrived situations, which when utilized, can create 'change, in accordance with one's will.'"[18]

LaVey points out that terms such as "fascination" and "glamour" have their origins in the world of coercive magic. Although their original sense faded over time, it is still clear that these words refer to attraction and interest—particularly the sort based on appearances. "Fascination" derives from the Latin verb *fascinare*, "to cast a spell upon," which is also related to the noun *fascinum*, "an evil spell; a phallic-shaped magical amulet." "Glamour" was originally a Scottish dialectal variant of "grammar" in the sense of learned magic (similarly, another variant of "grammar" is the word *grimoire*, which refers to a book of magic spells). In LaVey's understanding:

> The antiquated meaning of glamour is witchcraft. The most important asset to the modern witch is her ability to be alluring, or to utilize glamour. The word "fascination" has a similarly occult origin. Fascination was the term applied to the evil eye. To fix a person's gaze, in other words, fascinate, was to curse them with the evil eye. Therefore, if a woman had the ability to fascinate men, she was regarded as a witch.[19]

Correctly utilized, these abilities allow the enchantment of a targeted onlooker for the ultimate benefit of the sorceress or magician. This is where Mortensen's theories from *The Command to Look* come into the equation, for his book lays down a simple and straightforward set of techniques for

forcing viewers to see what you want them to see—without them consciously realizing *why* they are doing so.

Just as Mortensen asserted that a photographer or visual artist could attain success by applying the visual principles of his formula, LaVey explains how identical methods are essential in Satanic Lesser Magic. He describes the process in terms that come straight from Mortensen:

> Learning to effectively utilize the command to LOOK, is an integral part of a witch's or warlock's training. To manipulate a person, you must first be able to attract and hold his attention. The three methods by which the command to look can be accomplished are the utilization of sex, sentiment, or wonder, or any combination of these.[20]

LaVey then goes on to explain how the three thematic elements of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder are used as reference points in a Satanic witch's or warlock's deliberate crafting of a self-image designed to maximize the influence that will be had upon others. The first step, which requires brutal self-honesty, is the determination of which category (or categories) to employ. This type of selection process is very much akin to what Mortensen says regarding the "second phase" of weeding out photographs that don't contain the necessary qualities to succeed:

> Consider the subject matter of each picture. Decide *candidly*, unswayed by any personal element, whether the subject matter in each case is really of *general emotional appeal*. Note in particular whether any of them fit into the categories of SEX, SENTIMENT, or WONDER. No matter how excellent the qualities of IMPACT, relentlessly throw out everything in which the subject matter is lacking in general emotional appeal.[21]

Following a similar logic, LaVey explains that a would-be witch with an already attractive or sexy appearance must accentuate and capitalize on the Sex theme to the utmost, for "Once she has gained the man's attention, by using her sex appeal, she is free to manipulate him to her will."[22] The Sentiment theme, on the other hand, will typically be suited to older

women: “by conforming to an image of the sweet little old lady next door, she can employ the art of misdirection to accomplish her goals.”[23] The Wonder theme can be used by a witch whose natural appearance is already odd or in some way disconcerting: “By making her strange appearance work for her, she can manipulate people simply because they are fearful of the consequences should they not do what she asks.”[24] The same principles can be utilized by male sorcerers (or “warlocks,” as LaVey calls them). Handsome men should emphasize the Sex theme, whereas older men can perhaps accentuate their already “elfin or forest wizard” appearance with the Sentiment theme. The Wonder theme is reserved for those who present a “sinister or diabolic” appearance.[25]

For those who do not fit squarely into a single category, multiple themes can be combined for maximal effect.[26] This is in keeping with Mortensen’s analysis of his own pictures that illustrate *The Command to Look*, where he often points out how a particular image employs a combination of themes, such as Sex and Sentiment.[27] An especially dramatic effect occurs with the combination of Sex and Wonder—especially when the Wonder involved is of a sinister nature.[28]

LaVey was a master of this form of Lesser Magic. His deliberate cultivation of a devilish appearance—with goatee, shaved head, and black and red clothing—represents the sinister side of the Wonder category, which was then combined with the image of an amoral sexual liberator. This position was explicated in the lengthy section on “Satanic Sex” in *The Satanic Bible* as well as being emphasized by LaVey in countless interviews; it is even pithily encapsulated in the Church of Satan’s watchword of “indulgence.”

A similar combination of Sex and Wonder was evident in the way LaVey’s Church presented itself as a kind of public spectacle in its early days. Events and lectures took place at the Black House with all manner of sinister themes ranging from the history of torture to cannibalism. The Church’s rituals were thoroughly infused with sexuality: in addition to the standard element of a naked female “altar,” they also featured phallic imagery, sado-masochistic drama, and so on. The union of the Sex and Wonder themes in these ceremonies is amply on display in Ray Laurent’s

1970 documentary *Satanis: The Devil's Mass*, with its footage of early Church of Satan rituals involving nudity, masks, and aspects of forbidden sexuality.[29] As the news spread of such activities, men's magazines around the world took considerable interest in the Church, and LaVey authored a long-running tabloid column called "Letters from the Devil" that often focused on sexual topics.[30]

Mortensen's *Command* formula emphasizes that it does not necessarily matter *which* of the three themes—Sex, Sentiment, or Wonder—is applied, but only that such a theme (or a combination of themes) is consciously utilized and made *visible* to the targeted audience. Control is effected through the mechanism of sight, by commanding the viewer's gaze. LaVey writes:

> Visual imagery utilized for emotional reaction is certainly the most important device in the practice of lesser magic. Anyone who is foolish enough to say "looks don't mean a thing" is indeed deluded. Good looks are unnecessary, but "looks" certainly are needed![31]

The targets of such manipulation will be entirely unaware that a "command to look" has caused them to direct their attention in accordance with the artist-magician's will. This lack of awareness on the part of the "victim" is irrelevant, however, since Mortensen and LaVey believe that unconscious and instinctual impulses will always override more conscious, intellectual reasons for behavior.

THE COMMAND TO SNIFF

Carnality is central to Anton LaVey's philosophy. Sensorial impressions are therefore of paramount importance, as the Satanist is encouraged to indulge in the pleasures and stimulations of the here-and-now, privileging these experiences over mystical or other abstractions.

Although William Mortensen mainly articulates his imperative principles with regard to vision, he notes that "probably the most primitive of all sense impressions is that of the sense of touch. It is, therefore, particularly charged with profound emotional associations."[32] A picture

that successfully evokes “tactile” associations will cause the viewer to linger over the image more deeply, “since touching implies lingering.”[33] Following Mortensen’s formula, the associations that a picture generates should correlate with the themes of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder: for example, the smoothness of naked skin can amplify connotations of Sex; softness may increase Sentimental interest; and painful tactile impressions, such as the sight of sharp nails, can enhance a feeling of Wonder.[34]

LaVey with masked Satanists in the ritual chamber of the Black House

Following Mortensen's lead, LaVey consequentially applies the same logic to other senses, thus bringing the formula to the animate world in a startling way. LaVey first develops this approach in *The Satanic Bible* when he mentions odor as another ingredient to be employed in Lesser Magic: "even though we may, as human animals, deny many of the judgments based on this sense consciously, we still are motivated by our sense of smell just as surely as any all-fours animal."[35] LaVey's understanding of this area is largely indebted to Dr. Iwan Bloch's groundbreaking study *Odoratus Sexualis*, which presents an array of perverse case studies proving that "no sense impression calls forth so strong and prompt emotional reactions as olfactory sensations do."[36] However, the way in which LaVey applies this knowledge is fully in keeping with Mortensen's thematic trinity of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder.

With regard to odors that can be employed for the Sex theme, LaVey suggests the deliberate employment of "natural secretions" and "fragrances of the flesh" for sorcerous attraction. "These natural odors are the sexual stimulants which nature, in her magical wisdom, has provided."[37] By contrast, Sentiment-type odors stir deep-seated memories of childhood comforts or nostalgia for home and hearth: "The enchanting of a man, through his stomach, is first established by the smell of cooking! A 'sentiment' type of witch will find this one of the most useful of all charms."[38] LaVey does not provide any examples of Wonder-type odors, but presumably these would exhibit a curious allure of the unknown through their bizarre, exotic, or even slightly foreboding olfactory qualities.

What LaVey advocates here amounts to a "Command to Sniff" that is directly parallel to the Command to Look. With a bit of ingenuity the same strategy can be likewise pursued with regard to the senses of hearing and touch. LaVey's innovation in creating a multi-sensual—and thus a multidimensional—framework for Satanic Lesser Magic allows for almost limitless syncretic possibilities. Mastering the art, however, is ultimately a pragmatic endeavor:

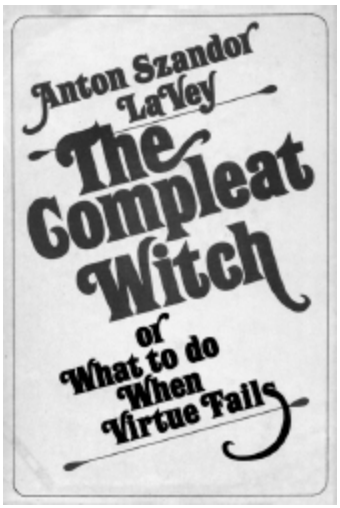
> Magic, like any other tool, requires a skilled hand. This does not mean that one need be a magician's magician or an advanced scholar of occult teachings. But it requires an application of

> principles—principles learned through study and experience. Life itself demands the application of certain principles. If one's wattage (potential) is high, and the proper principles are applied, there is very little that cannot be accomplished.[39]

Success in Satanic magic therefore hinges upon the personal artistry of the witch or warlock, guided by a proper understanding of certain timeless formulas and the principles that underlie them.

SATANIC WITCHERY: LESSER MAGIC FOR LADIES

Soon after establishing the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey began to offer private tutoring to women who sought proficiency in Satanic witchcraft. In the 1970 documentary *Satanis*, one of the participants in Church of Satan rituals at the Black House mentions that she first met LaVey after signing up for lessons in his "Witches' Charm School." In 1971 LaVey published an entire volume of this material as *The Compleat Witch, or What to Do When Virtue Fails*. The book, which is peppered with humorous asides and anecdotes, offers an elaborate methodology for women to realize their desires and goals through the deliberate manipulation of their unwitting male targets. LaVey's fundamental premise is that "if a woman wants anything in life, she can obtain it easier through a man than another woman, despite woman liberationists' bellows to the contrary."[40] Over the course of the book LaVey treats various occult topics—including the hidden power of personal names, the choice of an animal familiar, divination, sex magic, and spell casting—but always does so in unorthodox ways. These practical techniques are to be employed in accordance with a classification system called the "LaVey Personality Synthesizer." In consultation with this chart, a witch can assess the strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and desires both of herself and of her target, in order to successfully apply Lesser Magic based upon the "Law of the Attraction of Opposites."



Front cover of the original edition of *The Compleat Witch*

In *The Compleat Witch*, LaVey stresses once more that the faculty of vision is of utmost importance. At the outset of a chapter entitled "Looks Mean Everything," he states:

> If you have good looks and you want to be a witch, then you must exploit your beauty at every opportunity. Very few women actually realize just how much emphasis a man places on appearance. You don't have to be flashy to get visual attention either. Despite the sound of your voice, your scent or the texture of your skin, your appearance must command attention. If you are really ugly, you must capitalize on your grotesqueness.[41]

The witch's first order of business is to command her target to look at her. After this prerequisite has been achieved, she can use other methods of enchantment to compel the target toward fulfilling her needs.

Asserting that a "knowing witch always capitalizes on the physical typing that has been set up for her or chooses one she feels she can throw herself into," LaVey then gives some specific examples of such "type-casting" of self-image and appearance.[42] Although he does not explicitly mention Mortensen's three categories of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder, these clearly underlie his thinking. LaVey's entire paragraph is reproduced below. After each of his examples, I have indicated in brackets which Mortensen category or categories are being drawn upon.

> If you are thin, with raven hair and dark eyes and your face is rather long and angular, you should capitalize on the vampire theme and do all you can to hint at that image. [*Sex, Wonder*; *fear*] If you find people always wanting to help you and taking a protective attitude towards you, utilize a naive and innocent appearance and bearing to your advantage. [*Sentiment, as applied by a younger person*] If you have a "mean" look and attract meek men, then do all you can to look meaner! Be a veritable whip and leather type. [*Sex*; *fear*] If you're getting on in years and have a nose like a potato with a body to match, don't kid yourself into thinking that a facial vacuum and losing forty pounds will turn you into a seductress. Instead get yourself a couple of cats, fill your house full of weird bric-a-brac, learn to make cookies, and let it be known you're a witch! Soon you'll have more worthwhile male friends than you ever would have in your personality-less attempt at rejuvenation. [*Sentiment, as applied by an older woman*] If you're truly grotesque, with a face that would stop ten clocks and a voice like a klaxon, turn yourself into a real hag-monster and have fun scaring the Hell out of people! [*Wonder*; *fear*]

As I have noted for several of the above examples (the "vampire," the "dominatrix," and the "hag-monster"), the new self-image is intended to cultivate a certain degree of fear. For Mortensen, fear represents one of the greatest imperative impulses. As he declares in *The Command to Look*:

> To what sort of sense stimuli do animals and primitive men give their quickest and completest attention? It is to those stimuli that suggest DANGER. The first response of the race is to preserve itself; so the FEAR RESPONSE is the one that is most easily aroused.[43]

In line with this premise, LaVey makes the following comment on the psychological-emotional *effect* of different types of appearances:

> In practical witchery you must first command attention by your looks. Then, you should be able to create an enticement. If you can't

entice the viewer into doing what you want, you must *scare* him into doing it.[44]

William Mortensen's rendition of a Satanic rite: *The Mark of the Devil* (ca. 1927)

LaVey draws a stark distinction between his techniques of "applied witchcraft" (or "bitchcraft," as he also terms it) and any attempts that a witch might make to gain success through "pseudo-intellectualism" in which "words become a substitute for sex appeal."[45] Satanic witchcraft is based on the deliberate manipulation of the psyche, emotions, and behavior of others through the recognition of instinctual drives that most civilized people have forgotten still exist within themselves. LaVey felt that Mortensen had effectively pinpointed the most essential elements to be capitalized upon for such manipulation, and therefore he insists that the ingredients of Sex, Sentiment or Wonder "must accompany" the pursuit of witchery.[46] He further explains:

> Intellectualism for its own sake seldom has any place in the behavior pattern of the witch, unless one can cleverly combine it with sex and wonder themes. This would produce a glamorous lady mad-doctor, wearing a skimpy laboratory smock and working amidst the surroundings and equipment of Frankenstein's workshop. Such a woman would be expected to be highly articulate, as it would be consistent with her image. Undoubtedly, she would find many men that would submit to her "experiments." It should be obvious that in such a case, even pseudo-intellectualism is in order, as it is all part of the game.[47]

LaVey points out that the witch should never allow the pseudo-intellectual "verbosity" to take precedence over her physical attributes. If this tendency arises, then she must, as a counter-balance, train herself to "act stupid." Needless to say, *The Compleat Witch* is overflowing with extremely un-P.C. advice that would drive any modern feminist to hysteria.

THE LAW OF THE FORBIDDEN

While discussing the importance of visual stimuli, LaVey develops an intriguing theory that augments what he learned from Mortensen. He calls it "The Law of the Forbidden."

> The reason there has always been a fascination for witchcraft and sorcery is because it has consistently been considered taboo. Your first duty as a witch is to your appearance. Men are all voyeurs, and most of what they are attracted to is based on what they see. What they see in you, as a witch, must be fascinating, and *nothing* is so fascinating as that which is not meant to be seen.[48]

The Law of the Forbidden goes beyond mere sexual voyeurism. As LaVey explains, human beings are innately interested in seeing something "out of context with their everyday lives, something that is *for real*, but not something they can pay a few bucks for to see whenever they want."[49] Such a sight might be one of unexpected bloodshed, like an auto pile-up. In the context of LaVeyan witchcraft, however, it is sexually exciting scenarios

that offer a Satanic witch the perfect opportunity for manipulating her onlookers. According to LaVey, these scenarios should ideally employ the "Secrets of Indecent Exposure" together with an element of unintended embarrassment, such as that of the woman who doesn't realize her crotch is visible.[50] Thus an adroit witch will arouse the instinctive attraction of male onlookers on a primal level:

> When you place yourself in an embarrassing situation, you become submissive to your surroundings or you wouldn't blush! Your very aura becomes one of awareness that everyone is looking at you, directing their interest towards you, and in the case of a sexually stimulating situation, directing their energy towards you. You, then, become the magnet, the flame, the psychic receptacle for all your viewer's lust-energy. . . . Your appearance will serve as the out-going force that will snare your quarry, as an angler throws his bait. The self-consciousness of your embarrassment will reel in your line.[51]

LaVey's Lesser Magic aims at generating external stimulation for those in the magician's immediate environment. By purposefully channeling the sexual-emotional energy that is thereby aroused, a magician is able to exert her or his will upon the environment, forcing the human beings that inhabit it to serve a desired purpose.

PICTURE PATTERNS AND FASHION FORMULAS

In the chapter of *The Command to Look* entitled "Analysis of the Impact," Mortensen probes into the subconscious force that a picture exerts on the viewer's eye and mind. He believes that such impact is not based on an initial response to the subject matter, nor is it due to any pleasing aesthetic quality. Instead, "a picture exercises its demand on our attention *before* we know what it is about, and *before* we know whether it pleases us."[52] It is the presence of specific shapes or forms that commands attention and

creates impact for the viewer. This involuntary response to the visual "pattern" of the image is "purely biological" and rooted in primal-fear.[53]

Mortensen distills the visual triggers of primal fear down into four basic types:

1. Something that moves swiftly across our field of vision. We may not know *what* it is, but we know that it *moves*—and with swiftness and determination.
2. Something that approaches in a slithering, furtive fashion.
3. The threat of *sharpness*, whether of tooth or blade.
4. A massive stationary object that blocks our path. It may be a man or beast or just an inanimate object, but it is compact and formidable and indomitably awaits our coming.[54]

These categories are visually represented by four simple patterns, respectively: the *diagonal*, which "also represents the primitive source of terror, the lightning flash"; the snaking *S-curve*; threatening combinations of triangles; and the compact *dominant mass*, which serves as an "obstacle to our movement."[55]

In codifying his doctrine of Satanic visual aesthetics, Anton LaVey makes considerable use of William Mortensen's "picture pattern" theory. This is especially evident in the chapter of *The Compleat Witch* that deals with the subject of clothing and fashion.[56]

LaVey's analysis concerns the basic visual forms that women's clothing can serve to emphasize. After lambasting the ongoing trend toward unisex fashion, he counters: "In order to practice magic, you must follow natural law, not violate it. Certain curves are conducive to the appearance of a woman—*any woman*."[57] LaVey bemoans the fact that most modern clothing is designed to deliberately downplay a woman's natural attributes. In his view the fashion industry has established a paradigm that compels women to reject older styles (which often emphasized voluptuousness) as "outdated," in favor of more modern, angular, and androgynous styles. This is an affront to primal sensual appeal, however, since the "so-called 'bulges'

that a woman shuns in herself are the feminine principle in a curvilinear form."[58]

LaVey divides female clothing into three basic "fashion patterns": the "straight," the "concave," and the "naturally feminine convex configurations."[59] The first pattern emphasizes straight lines and angles; the second de-emphasizes or tries to reverse traditional female "curves"; and the third plays up feminine contours and represents a "series of curves, or better yet, circles." Naturally, the final category is the one LaVey favors most:

> Circles, circles everywhere, all corresponding to each other—circles for the breasts, shoulders, thighs, calves, arms, abdomen, even the area of the throat. Circles within circles—the same circles every artist and cartoonist learns are the foundation of the picture of a woman. And the fashion designers think they can come up with an act to follow this one?[60]

LaVey asserts that "straight" and "concave" patterns create a sense of antagonism for the observer. Straight or angular patterns should therefore only be worn under very specific circumstances, for example, if the man targeted for bewitchment is of an "extremely submissive nature." Concave patterns are even more problematic, as they have the effect of a "barb" that sends a message of "Don't touch me."[61]

LaVey's visual-sensual strategy reaches a climax in his eloquent apologia for the high-heel shoe, which is deemed the witch's footwear *par excellence*. Although he notes that the high heel derives some of its fetishistic appeal from its quality of exaggeration, the primary unconscious reason for the visual attraction of a three-inch spike heel is that it

> forms a distinct "S" curve from the top of the heel to the point where the spike touches the ground. This "S" curve is a traditional curve of beauty, the serpentine curve of mystery, the epitome of fluidic, feminine contour. No other style of footwear is as flagrant in the portrayal of this emotionally pleasing configuration.[62]

Although William Mortensen described the S-curve as a compelling source of fear in man's primal subconscious, he also acknowledged its intriguing beauty:

> Secret and furtive movement is represented by the snake-like S-CURVE. Here we have the prototype of such fears as the serpent, the tiger that slithers through the grass, the hidden enemy that twists and turns. This is the real basis of the fascination of the so-called "Line of Beauty," which was described by Hogarth.[63]

Among the four basic picture patterns, then, the S-curve is unique in simultaneously evoking a potential threat as well as a sinuous source of pleasure—a primal source of feminine power.

LaVey believes that the enchanting power of the high heel extends beyond the form of the shoe itself. When actually worn, it conjures up a diabolical trinity of S-curves:

> Now, something very magical happens when the foot is placed within the high-heeled shoes and the wearer stands up. The back of the calf is thrown out in an *exaggeration* of its normal plane, creating *another* "S" curve directly above the one formed by the shoe. Still another *exaggeration* is formed above the knee, where we find the buttocks thrown out, along with the hips and thighs, and forming a third "S"—this one starting where the waist nips in, bulging out for hips and buttocks and retreating as the knee is approached. One might call this a very unholy trinity, as it is sure to be the basis for much temptation.[64]

It would seem that for LaVey, the S-curves that are intrinsically created by the high heel provide the perfect mixture of sensuousness (Sex) and mystery (Wonder), with a hidden dose of subconscious primal fear adding to the irresistible magnetism of the equation.

SATANIC GREATER MAGIC

In *The Satanic Rituals*, LaVey remarks that the "more readily one can apply the principles needed to effect a proficiency in *Lesser Magic*, the greater one's chances of attainment through the use of *ritual*—or *ceremonial*—magic."[65] This latter type of sorcery is called Greater Magic.

Rituals conducted as Greater Magic are elaborate and formal in structure, typically involving the use of a ritual chamber, props, and particular recitations and actions. The magician carries out the ritual at a certain time and place. According to LaVey, the goal is "to isolate the otherwise dissipated adrenal and other emotionally induced energy [of the Satanic magician(s) involved], and convert it into a dynamically transmittable force."[66]

A Greater Magic ritual functions primarily on a psycho-emotional level, and therefore all intellectual activity must take place before the actual ceremony.[67] This includes the technical planning of the rite and all of the conscious aesthetic artistry that goes into it. In LaVey's system, a proper ritual will make use of five ingredients: Desire, Timing, Imagery, Direction, and what he calls the "Balance Factor" (he describes this as a realistic "knowledge of one's own limitations" and the ability to work "in harmony with nature, not against it").[68]

Essentially, Satanic rituals of Greater Magic are a form of theatrical psychodrama. In the ritual chamber, at least for the duration of the rite, everyday reality is suspended.[69] This "intellectual decompression chamber" is a place where polarized forces may be tapped into and used for willful ends:

> Modern Satanism realizes man's need for an 'other side,' and has realistically accepted that polarity—at least within the confines of the ritual chamber. Thus a Satanic chamber can serve—depending upon the degree of embellishment and the extent of the acts within—as a meditation chamber for the entertainment of unspoken thoughts, or a veritable palace of perversity.[70]

In giving full, explosive rein to thoughts and actions that would otherwise be forbidden in "polite company," Satanic ritual is able to channel and focus the emotional energies that are thereby unleashed.

The specific rites will vary depending upon the goals of the Satanic magician, but the basic "ritual template" employs features that derive from the traditional iconography of the Black Mass: a Priest or officiant; a naked female altar (a symbol of carnality and worldly lust); ritual instruments such as candles, sword, knife, chalice, aspergillum, and censer; devil or animal masks; and hooded robes.

In LaVey's system, the rituals of Satanic Greater Magic fall into three categories, according to their aims: sex rituals, compassion rituals, and destruction rituals.[71] A sex ritual is intended to create a reciprocal sexual attraction in a person whom the magician lusts after—in other words, its purpose is to enchant a specific partner for the fulfillment of sexual desires. A compassion ritual is aimed at helping others, or helping the magician who carries it out. A destruction ritual, also known as a hex or curse, has the goal of removing a contemptible, annoying, or problematic person from the magician's life.

Satanic witches celebrate their sabbat (French erotic postcard, 1910)

William Mortensen's vision of a diabolical witch (untitled experiment, ca. 1926)

These three ritual categories of Satanic Greater Magic correspond neatly to Mortensen's thematic categories of Sex, Sentiment, and Wonder. This is not altogether surprising, given LaVey's emphasis on the fundamentally *emotional* nature of all Satanic ritual and since Mortensen describes these qualities as being the three most essential "sources of emotional appeal" for human beings.[72]

The first correspondence, between Mortensen's principle of Sex and the aims of a sex ritual, hardly needs further explanation.

The second correspondence, between the principle of Sentiment and the aims of a compassion ritual, may be less obvious. Mortensen explains Sentiment as being "concerned with the softer, tenderer things of life. . . . In a sentimental mood we see familiar things touched with grandeur, and remote things made intensely interesting and personal."[73] He goes on to list some of the typical manifestations of the theme as relating to the "softer aspects of sex," children, hardship, domestic life, animals, the glamour of the past, and so forth. Regarding the compassion ritual, LaVey explains: "The compassion, or sentiment, ritual is performed for the purpose of helping others, or helping oneself. Health, domestic happiness, business activities, material success, and scholastic prowess are but a few of the situations covered in a compassion ritual."[74] LaVey's secondary designation of this as a "sentiment ritual" is a clear nod to Mortensen.

Although any type of magic would, by definition, fall under the rubric of Mortensen's principle of Wonder, this is all the more true for destructive rituals, for these explicitly stir the most ancient fears that have always surrounded witchcraft and malevolent sorcery. As Mortensen explains regarding the Wonder theme:

> Night and its shadows surround us during half the period of our life on earth, and at least half the things about us remain strange and mysterious in their working. We all of us are conscious of forces that move beyond the shadows. The 'Powers of Darkness' are still with us.[75]

He concludes his discussion of the various facets of Wonder by stating how it "may draw near the fringes of fear in the supernatural and witchcraft and demonology. And the final manifestation of the wonder theme is that silent Mystery of Mysteries, Death, before which we all pause appalled and fascinated."[76] A Satanic destruction ritual, with its aim of magically bringing about the death of a perceived enemy, makes use of such "Wonder ingredients" in the most exemplary way.

A GREATER MAGIC RITUAL: HOW TO BECOME A WEREWOLF

One of LaVey's most notorious rituals appeared in the form of a short article entitled "How to Become a Werewolf: The Fundamentals of Lycanthropic Transformation, Their Principles and Application." The text was published in a 1978 issue of the Church of Satan newsletter *The Cloven Hoof,*[77] although LaVey had already discussed a nearly identical scenario in a tabloid advice column in 1970.[78] LaVey's ritual provides a methodology that will allow a magician to self-induce a lycanthropic transformation, for "anyone is a potential werewolf," although a certain temperament is necessary to fully achieve the most extreme outcome.[79] As with so much of LaVeyan ritual, the procedure draws its energy from a fundamental polarity: "Only the higher man can metamorphose . . . He knows he is circumspect and cultured the greater part of his life. So a transition to animalism can be entertained without compunction."[80] Thus, the more refined the practitioner, the more effectively the threshold between gentility and ferality can be crossed.

Mortensen's influence upon the ritual is apparent from LaVey's remark that "The three principal emotions of sex, sentiment and wonder may be considered as triggering mechanisms [for lycanthropic transformation], as will be shown by the following formula by which one can effect the change from man into beast."[81] The ritual employs sexual psychodrama to reconnect with the predatory bestial nature that dwells within man. In a willed and controlled manner, by initiating a deliberate and dangerous interplay of the "triggering" elements of Sex (in the form of erotic tension and release) and Wonder (through intense fear and grotesque transformation) the magician facilitates an experience of the most primal polarities of the "animal cycle." More than any other Satanic ritual, this one embodies LaVey's dictum that "there is a beast in man that should be exercised, not exorcised."

THE DEVIL IS, NOT DOES

In Chapter 5 of *The Command to Look*, William Mortensen develops the principle of "Is, Not Does," which is reflected in his directive to "eliminate the dateline." In doing so a photographer evokes immortal and universal aesthetic forms, as opposed to including "up-to-date" reference points that eventually prove transient and irrelevant to the viewers of the image.

Anton LaVey made the "Is, Not Does" credo a cornerstone of his philosophy. Accordingly, he presented himself in the archetypal, timeless image of the powerful magician. In an article on self-deification, he instructs:

> Never be fashionable; always be mysterious and enigmatic. Remember: man follows his gods, and his gods are never trendy. You never met a God who wanted to be one of the crowd."[82]

For LaVey, archetypal elements serve as instruments of power. Wielded satanically, they conjure up an anachronistically disconcerting effect—like seeing a shiny 1949 Cadillac breezing down a contemporary street—that leaves the viewer slightly off-kilter and suggestible.

LaVey specifically applies the principle of "eliminating the dateline" to fashion—or rather, as resistance to fashion—but this same prescription extends well beyond the matter of clothing and cosmetics. With equal vehemence LaVey urged the rejection of countless cultural fashions—artistic, musical, and otherwise. To maintain an immortal, fearsome appeal, one should never "date oneself" with contemporary concerns, for "the pollution of the present is literally deadly poison."[83] One can avoid prepackaged forms of distress and demoralization by cultivating a deliberate distance from popular culture. Better yet, by actively patronizing "that which is out of vogue or not yet in vogue," the magician forges a direct link with deeper and healthier forces.[84]

LaVey taught his witches and warlocks to foster a sensorial suspension of time through Lesser Magic, thereby gaining in power, but he also applied the dictum of "timelessness" to the sphere of Greater Magic. Over the course of his career, LaVey substantially developed the parameters of what

constitutes an effective Satanic ritual chamber. The "intellectual decompression chamber" of his early writings became more elaborate in scope, eventually leading to his advocacy of diabolically designed "Total Environments" that evoke a bygone time and place. In a deliberate act against the "dateline," the Satanist constructs a Total Environment that can be entered and re-entered at whim. This represents a permanent new reality: a willfully made world that is entirely one's own.

SATANIC AESTHETICS AND THE DOMINANT TRAPEZOID

William Mortensen's "pictorial imperative" distills and applies certain laws of psycho-optical aesthetics—or, in the case of the picture forms that incur a primal-fear response, one might also say "anti-aesthetics." When discussing the underlying aesthetic that informs his visual theories, Mortensen occasionally makes reference to ancient classical principles of proportion and geometry, as well as to later artists who rediscovered, promoted, and elaborated upon these ideas. Two clear influences in this regard are William Hogarth, who wrote *Analysis of Beauty* in 1753, and Jay Hambridge, who developed theories of "dynamic symmetry" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Anton LaVey's emphasis on the importance of aesthetics for the Satanist is not surprising given his own background as an artist, photographer, and musician. Aesthetics were even codified into Church of Satan doctrine in 1987 when LaVey set forth the "Nine Satanic Sins," the ninth and final of which is "Lack of Aesthetics." In describing this transgression, LaVey refers to the neglect of "classical standards of beauty and form" in modern, consumer-based society. By contrast, he notes how

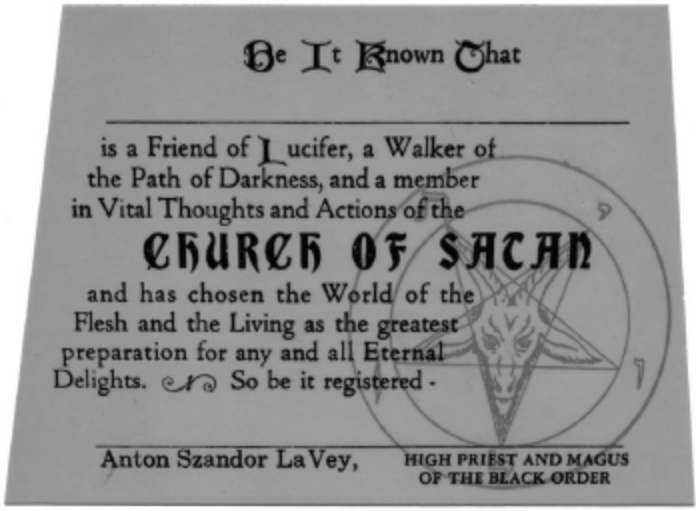
> an eye for beauty, for balance, is an essential Satanic tool and must be applied for greatest magical effectiveness. It's not what's supposed to be pleasing—it's what is. . . . there are universally pleasing and harmonious configurations that should not be denied.[85]

Like Mortensen, however, LaVey's sense of aesthetics was not solely concerned with the classically harmonious and pleasant. Both men were fascinated by the existence of particular configurations that induce distress. Mortensen and LaVey both discuss the innate power that certain visual shapes wield over those who encounter them. The instinctual responses that grant this power are of primary importance in LaVey's Satanic ideology, and therefore it is hardly coincidental that Mortensen's "four basic picture patterns" turn up in various guises in the symbolism and visual expressions of Satanism.

We have already seen how LaVey applied ideas developed from Mortensen's picture patterns to his own theories about feminine fashion, and how the configuration of the S-curve serves as an essential element in the fashion of the properly attired Satanic witch. The most iconic Satanic symbol, the upside-down pentagram with its five outward-thrusting points, is a powerful reflection of the visual pattern of the "triangle combination." LaVey further applied such principles in creating his own personal symbol, which he alone wore on rings and pendants. Here he combined a pentagram with a visual device from another category, that of the "diagonal": the pentagram is shot through along a central vertical line with a lightning bolt.

Mortensen's fourth picture-pattern category, that of the "dominant mass," also resonated with LaVey's Satanic visual sense. In *The Command to Look*, Mortensen describes various factors that serve to create a "dominant mass": unity, cohesion, isolation, contrast, size, and stability. With regard to the factor of stability, he states: "A mass is more formidable if it seems firmly planted and immovable. Hence the effectiveness of the pyramid form."[86] As Blanche Barton writes, "What Mortensen termed 'dominant mass' coincided precisely with what LaVey was formulating about the hulking visual (and therefore magical) power of the trapezoid."[87]

William Mortensen's photograph *Fear*, which hung on the wall of LaVey's personal ritual chamber



An original trapezoid-shaped membership card for the Church of Satan

By 1962 LaVey had codified what he termed the "Law of the Trapezoid," which basically states that certain shapes and angular configurations have the inherent power to compel fascination and induce unease or distress:

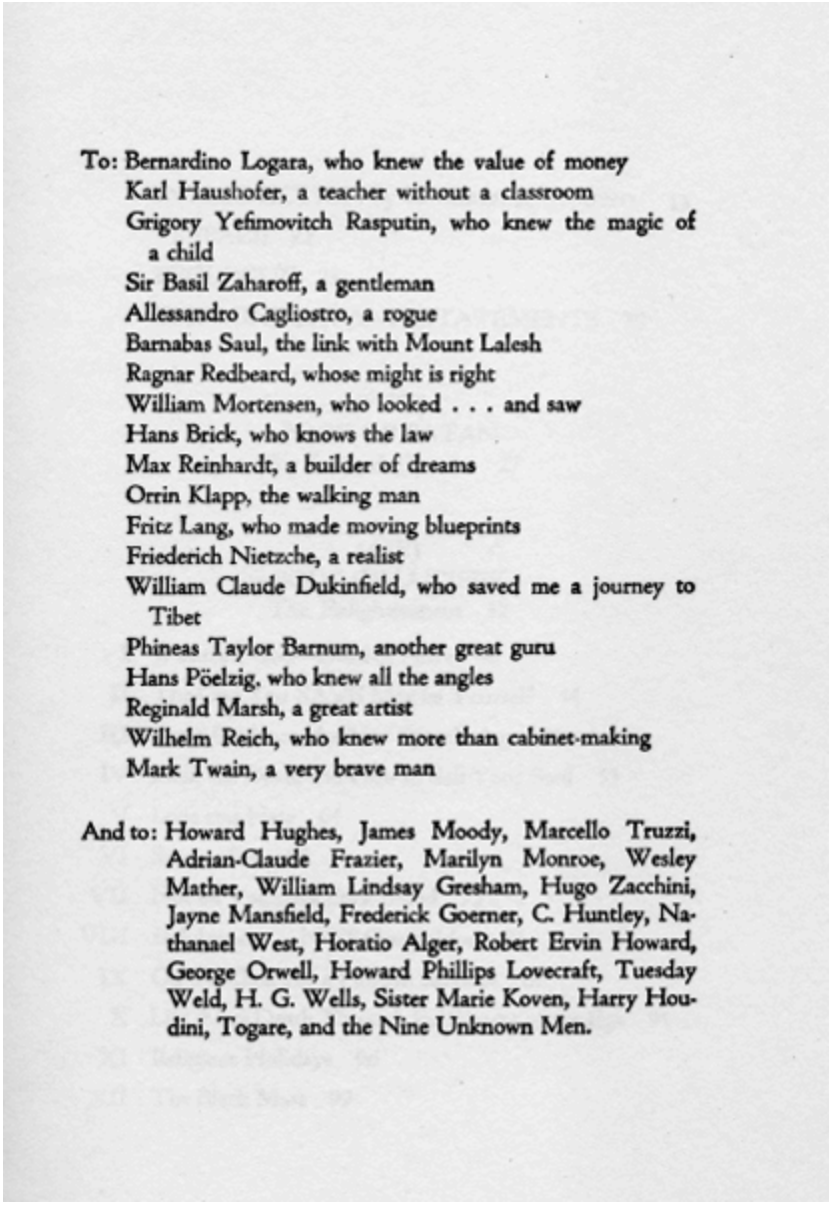
> Any shape or spatial concept that triggers fear could therefore be considered evil, yet without such "evil," there could also be no progress, only complacency and stagnation. Needless to say, the fearsome is also fascinating and awesome.
>
> What shapes intensify fear? Those which are overbearing, unbalanced, jagged, confusing. The reason a triangle or pyramid in its perfect form is pleasing, is because it is complete, like the imaginary vanishing points in drawings.[88]

So while a pyramid shape does function as a dominant mass, LaVey recognizes that its essential form is aesthetically *pleasing* to the human eye. It will certainly command attention but it is unlikely to induce fear. For the latter to happen, a modification of imbalance is needed:

> The most disturbing shape of all is a trapezoid in its myriad forms. A perfect trapezoid is a frustrated pyramid. . . . a trapezoid says to the unconscious, "I am here, solid as can be, more massive than any ordinary block, but something's missing and it bothers you."[89]

Mortensen's concept of the "dominant mass" was, however, not the only ingredient in the Law of the Trapezoid. LaVey drew upon an eclectic range of sources to bolster his theory. These ranged from personal observations and experiences of disturbing rooms, buildings, and objects ("the old-style coffin, like an elongated hexagon, the 1936 Cord sedan, the Baguette diamond, the slanted blade breaking the symmetry of a guillotine"[90]), to historical references (Mayan and Aztec temples and their bloody sacrifices), to cryptic imagery from expressionist horror films or more recent supernatural fiction. In Frank Belknap Long's 1929 short story "The Hounds of Tindalos," for example, supernatural predatory beasts are able to enter the three-dimensional world via angles ("The foul expresses itself through angles: the pure through curves," a character in the tale explains), while in H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu-mythos tale "The Haunter of the Dark," an obscure artifact called a "shining trapezohedron" is used to invoke a monstrous entity.

Although William Mortensen never formally discussed the trapezoid, it is a shape that frequently appears in the compositional patterns of his photographs. For example, many of Mortensen's images that incorporate Sex and Wonder themes exhibit an underlying trapezoid-shaped dominant mass (or often, a multiple set of them). A prime example is *The Anatomy Student*—which certainly exhibits more of a sinister, erotic, and even Satanic feeling than anything to do with medicine. Mortensen describes it as featuring a "Dominant Mass of a broad and stable pyramidal type,"[91] but this would be more accurately called "trapezoidal." Similar angular patterns are evident in images like *The Warlock, The Tantric Sorcerer, The Priestess*, and *Preparation for the Sabbot*, among others.



To: Bernardino Logara, who knew the value of money
Karl Haushofer, a teacher without a classroom
Grigory Yefimovitch Rasputin, who knew the magic of a child
Sir Basil Zaharoff, a gentleman
Allessandro Cagliostro, a rogue
Barnabas Saul, the link with Mount Lalesh
Ragnar Redbeard, whose might is right
William Mortensen, who looked . . . and saw
Hans Brick, who knows the law
Max Reinhardt, a builder of dreams
Orrin Klapp, the walking man
Fritz Lang, who made moving blueprints
Friederich Nietzche, a realist
William Claude Dukinfield, who saved me a journey to Tibet
Phineas Taylor Barnum, another great guru
Hans Pöelzig. who knew all the angles
Reginald Marsh, a great artist
Wilhelm Reich, who knew more than cabinet-making
Mark Twain, a very brave man

And to: Howard Hughes, James Moody, Marcello Truzzi, Adrian-Claude Frazier, Marilyn Monroe, Wesley Mather, William Lindsay Gresham, Hugo Zacchini, Jayne Mansfield, Frederick Goerner, C. Huntley, Nathanael West, Horatio Alger, Robert Ervin Howard, George Orwell, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Tuesday Weld, H. G. Wells, Sister Marie Koven, Harry Houdini, Togare, and the Nine Unknown Men.

Anton LaVey's dedication page from *The Satanic Bible*

For Anton LaVey, the trapezoid became more than just a diabolical form of dominant mass. The recognition of the Law of the Trapezoid represents a cornerstone of Satanic aesthetics, and it frequently turns up in Satanic iconography and rituals (Satanic altars are often trapezoidal). The Church of Satan's hidden ruling body, the Council of Nine, is alternatively known as the Order of the Trapezoid. In *The Satanic Rituals*, LaVey even develops the premise of an entire specialized genre of "trapezoidal magic" utilizing bizarre geometry and "angles of non-Euclidian incidence," reflective

planes, paradoxical frequencies and emissions of "black and white sound," electrical energy, and atmospheric ionization.[92] It is the stuff of a mad scientist's workshop—or a William Mortensen grotesque.

‡ ‡ ‡

ANTON LAVEY WOVE TOGETHER the ideology for his brand of Satanism from countless different strands. The roster of figures who influenced him ranges widely from philosophers to sociologists, filmmakers, fiction writers, iconoclasts, and artists. In the case of the photographer William Mortensen, LaVey included him on the dedication list of *The Satanic Bible* as one who truly "saw." By turn, through his contact with Mortensen's ideas and images, LaVey's own eyes were opened to revelations about the pragmatic application of aesthetics and anti-aesthetics, direction and misdirection, and psycho-visual methods of control.

Anton LaVey may go down in history as a "black magician," but his greatest role models were not chosen from the ranks of the historical occultists. LaVey disdained most occult writing as little more than the crypto-Christian scribbling of muddled mystagogues. By contrast, an artist like William Mortensen—a master of light, dark, and shadow who knew the secrets of visual persuasion—was far more important to him, and he took Mortensen's theories to heart. The imprint of Mortensen's formulas is evident throughout LaVey's Satanic philosophy, in his theories of Greater and Lesser Magic, and in his prescriptions for effective ritual. From the very start, Anton LaVey's Church of Satan was founded upon pillars of Fear and the Grotesque, but even more so of Sex and Wonder—and the eyes of the world could not ignore the Command to Look.

‡ ‡ ‡

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1 Both issued by Feral House.

2 Stephen Flowers, *Lords of the Left-Hand Path: Forbidden Practices and Spiritual Heresies from the Cult of Set to the Church of Satan* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2012), 302.

3 Personal correspondence from Blanche Barton, 5 May 2013.

4 Blanche Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (Feral House, 1992), 160–61.

5 Barton, *The Secret Life*, 161.
6 Personal correspondence from Blanche Barton, 6 June 2014 and 13 June 2014.
7 LaVey, *The Devil's Notebook*, 112.
8 Mortensen, *Monsters & Madonnas*, facing-page commentary to *Belphegor*.
9 Mortensen, *Monsters & Madonnas*, facing-page commentary to *The Heretic*.
10 Personal correspondence from Blanche Barton, 5 May 2013.
11 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 65.
12 Mortensen, *Monsters & Madonnas*, facing-page commentary to *Preparation for the Sabbot*.
13 LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 18.
14 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 110.
15 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 109.
16 Flowers, *Lords of the Left-Hand Path*, 312, 361.
17 LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 19.
18 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 111. At the end of the statement LaVey is quoting his general definition of magic, as referred to earlier.
19 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 111.
20 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 111–12.
21 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 77.
22 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 112.
23 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 112.
24 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 112.
25 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 112–13.
26 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 112.
27 E.g., *Girl of the Highlands, Girl with Corset, Doris*, and *Betty*.
28 In Mortensen's estimation, images in *The Command to Look* that make use of Sex and Wonder include: *Girl of Smyrna, Rope Dancer, Stamboul, Circe*, and *The New Race*; with more sinister examples being *The Anatomy Student, The Heretic, Death of Hypatia*, and *Preparation for the Sabbot*. I would include *L'Amour* in the latter group as well.
29 DVD reissue, Something Weird Video, 2003.
30 The columns are collected and reprinted in Anton LaVey, *Letters from the Devil*, ed. Kevin I. Slaughter (Baltimore: Underworld Amusements, 2010).
31 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 113.
32 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 68.
33 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 69.
34 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 69.
35 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 113.
36 Dr. Iwan Bloch, *Odoratus Sexualis: A Scientific and Literary Study of Sexual Scents and Erotic Perfumes* (New York: Panurge, 1934), 118. For his part, LaVey considered habitual bathing and "scent-masking" to be dishonest and even "genetically disastrous and eugenically unsound." See LaVey, "Don't Bathe," in *Satan Speaks!*, 134–36; here at 135.
37 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 113.
38 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 113.
39 LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 21.
40 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, xi. Page numbers cited for this book are likewise valid for the reissued version, *The Satanic Witch*.
41 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 121.
42 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 15–16.
43 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 45–46.

44 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 19.
45 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 200.
46 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 200.
47 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 200.
48 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 140.
49 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 141.
50 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 145.
51 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 147.
52 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 45.
53 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 45–46.
54 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 47.
55 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 47–48.
56 See "Fashion: The Witch's Greatest Friend, The Witch: Fashion's Worst Enemy" in *The Compleat Witch*, 151–84. LaVey despised the whole premise of fashion, once writing: "Fashion, like Christianity, is a death cult. Both create dissatisfaction, insecurity and uncertainty silenced only by death." See LaVey, "The Death of Fashion," in *Satan Speaks!*, 115–17; here at 115.
57 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 155.
58 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 155.
59 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 156.
60 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 157.
61 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 156.
62 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 168.
63 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 47.
64 LaVey, *The Compleat Witch*, 168–69.
65 LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 21.
66 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 58.
67 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 111.
68 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 121–28.
69 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 119–20.
70 LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 16.
71 Cf. LaVey, "The Three Types of Satanic Ritual," in *The Satanic Bible*, 114–18.
72 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 54–57.
73 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 56.
74 LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 115.
75 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 57.
76 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 57.
77 It appears as an appendix in Barton, *The Secret Life*, 253–58, which is the source for the citations here; as well as in LaVey, *The Devil's Notebook*, 120–25. The original article appeared in *The Cloven Hoof*, issue 71 (Jan./Feb. 1978): 1–4.
78 Facsimile in LaVey, *Letters from the Devil*, unpaginated.
79 LaVey, "How to Become a Werewolf," 253.
80 LaVey, "How to Become a Werewolf," 253.
81 LaVey, "How to Become a Werewolf," 253.
82 LaVey, "How to be God (or the Devil)," in *The Devil's Notebook*, 66–67; here at 66. My thanks to Blanche Barton for pointing me toward many of LaVey's comments on this theme.
83 LaVey, "What's New," in *Satan Speaks!*, 108–111; here at 108.
84 Cf. LaVey, "A Medicine for Melancholy," in *The Devil's Notebook*, 13–15; here at 15.
85 Barton, *The Secret Life*, 247.

86 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 49.
87 Barton, *The Secret Life*, 161.
88 LaVey, "Law of the Trapezoid," *Cloven Hoof* 64 (Nov./Dec., 1976): 1–4. Reprinted in *The Devil's Notebook*, 111–16; here at 111.
89 LaVey, "Law of the Trapezoid," 112.
90 LaVey, "Law of the Trapezoid," 113.
91 Mortensen, *The Command to Look*, 88.
92 See, in particular, the "The Law of the Trapezoid: Die elektrischen Vorspiele" in *The Satanic Rituals*, 106–130.

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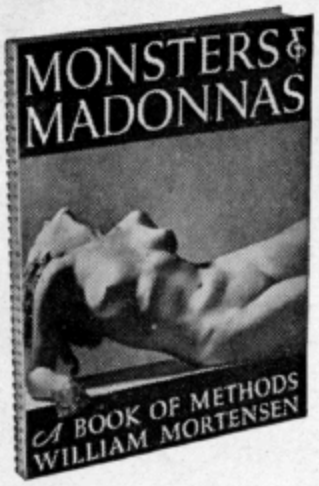

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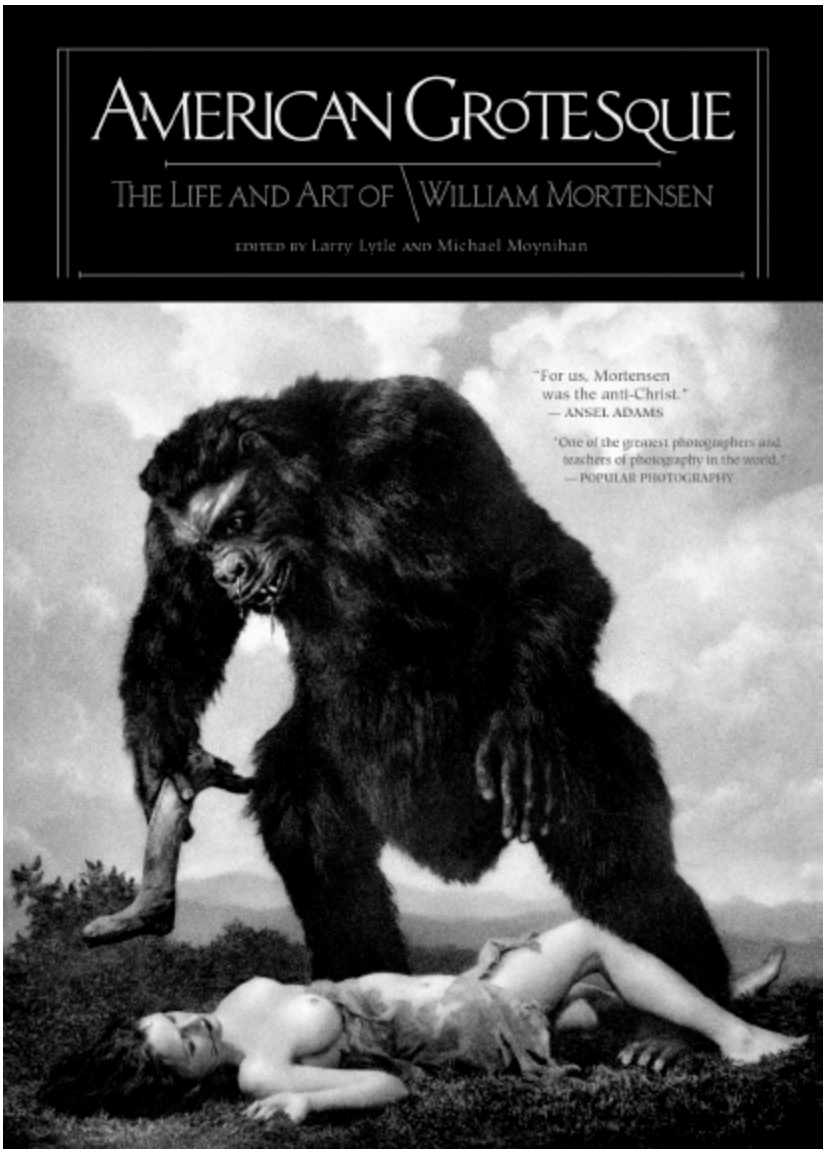

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